

1-1-2016

# Men and College Enrollment: A Grounded Theory Study on Understanding how Gender Stereotypes Influence Men and Their Decision-Making

Mark Bukowski

Nova Southeastern University, [mark.bukowski@yahoo.com](mailto:mark.bukowski@yahoo.com)

This document is a product of extensive research conducted at the Nova Southeastern University [College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences](#). For more information on research and degree programs at the NSU College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, please click [here](#).

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss\\_dcar\\_etd](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_dcar_etd)



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

## Share Feedback About This Item

---

### NSUWorks Citation

Mark Bukowski. 2016. *Men and College Enrollment: A Grounded Theory Study on Understanding how Gender Stereotypes Influence Men and Their Decision-Making*. Doctoral dissertation. Nova Southeastern University. Retrieved from NSUWorks, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences – Department of Conflict Resolution Studies. (48)  
[https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss\\_dcar\\_etd/48](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_dcar_etd/48).

This Dissertation is brought to you by the CAHSS Theses and Dissertations at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Conflict Resolution Studies Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

Men and College Enrollment: A Grounded Theory Study on Understanding how Gender  
Stereotypes Influence Men and Their Decision-Making

by

Mark Bukowski

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University  
2016

Copyright © by

Mark Bukowski  
November 2016

Nova Southeastern University  
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

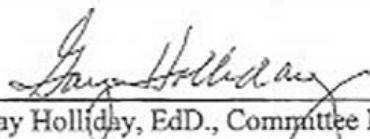
This dissertation was submitted by Mark Bukowski under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

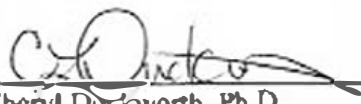
11/30/16  
Date of Final Defense

  
Cheryl Duckworth, Ph.D.

  
Robin Cooper, Ph.D., Committee Member

  
Gay Holliday, EdD., Committee Member

11/30/16  
Date of Final Approval

  
Cheryl Duckworth, Ph.D.  
Chair

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My wife, Raegann, who has supported me through the highs and lows of almost 10 years of this project. She watched me start with high hopes and almost end in defeat. She encouraged me to give it that last shot and to think of the regret of possibly not finishing. Thank you and I love you.

My children, Hannah and Trenton, who were not born when I started this endeavor and this year now will both be in elementary school. I hope that, if nothing else, when the day comes that you fully understand the scope of this degree it serves as a lesson in perseverance and dedication.

My parents, John and Marion, who taught me the virtue of hard work, ethics, and responsibility.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Cheryl Duckworth, who agreed to serve in this capacity when no one else would, after a series of chairs left the university. Although higher education studies is not her specialty, she agreed to be my chair at a point where I was closest to leaving the program and, if not for her, probably would have.

My other committee members, Dr. Robin Cooper and Dr. Gay Holliday, for their time, efforts, and expertise. Thank you for your support.

Dr. Richard Brooks, PhD in Conflict Resolution Studies. It has been a long and winding road to say the least, one which I was not sure either of us would finish. Attending your final defense, earlier in the year, gave me the boost to complete mine.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Abstract .....	vii
Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Research Questions.....	5
Outline of Dissertation .....	6
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .....	7
Current Gender Roles and Conflict .....	7
Family Dynamics and Men’s Roles.....	9
Brief Synopsis of Community Colleges in the United States .....	12
Changes Facing Community Colleges.....	13
Gender in Social Discourse .....	16
Labor Specific Example of Social Change .....	18
Males’ Perceptions of Themselves .....	18
Factors of Campus Life: Professors, Majors, Distractions?.....	24
Males and Community College Enrollment.....	26
The Need for Shifting the Study.....	27
Male Success at the Community College Level: Racial Factors?.....	28
Chapter 3: Research Methods .....	32
Introduction .....	32
Position of the Literature Review .....	34
Rationale for a Qualitative Grounded Theory Study .....	34

Interviews and Process.....	39
Data Collection.....	41
Data Analysis .....	42
Ethics.....	43
Expected Contributions of the Research.....	44
Chapter 4: Results.....	46
Overview .....	46
Participants .....	47
Data Analysis .....	47
Demographics.....	48
Memo-Writing.....	49
Data Coding: Initial Codes.....	50
Data Coding: Focused Codes .....	51
Theoretical Coding .....	51
Findings.....	52
Family Influences.....	52
Family member(s) went to college.....	55
Family pressures to attend college .....	58
Act as a role model for children or younger siblings. ....	60
Economic Factors.....	63
The need to keep up. ....	64
Provide basic needs. ....	66
Military benefits.....	68



Social Factors .....	70
Male perspective of “bumming it.” .....	72
Perspective of needing to be a provider. ....	75
Influence of high school years. ....	77
Conclusion .....	78
Saturation .....	79
Theoretical Model.....	80
Constructivist Grounded Theory .....	80
Formation of the Grounded Theory .....	83
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations .....	88
Family .....	89
Recommendation .....	90
Society.....	92
Recommendation .....	93
Economic Factors .....	94
Recommendation .....	95
Strengths of the Study .....	97
Diverse Population of Male Students.....	97
Only Community College Level Studied .....	98
Unexpected Findings .....	98
Potential Limitations of the Study .....	99
One Area of the Country and State .....	99
Gender .....	99

College Payment Options .....	100
What Was Not Considered? .....	100
What Was Learned from the Study? .....	101
What Would Be Done Differently? .....	101
Predispositions .....	102
Prior to the Study .....	102
Post-Observation .....	102
Aligning with the Literature .....	103
Contribution to the Research .....	104
Current Gender Roles and Conflict .....	104
Community Colleges and Challenges Facing Higher Education .....	106
Contributions to the Field of Conflict Resolution Studies .....	107
Decision-Making Beyond Oneself .....	107
Gender Polarization .....	108
Conflict Resolution in Higher Education .....	109
References .....	112
American Association of Community Colleges. (2016, February). 2016 fact sheet .....	112
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter .....	118
Appendix B: Informed Consent .....	119
Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions .....	123
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer .....	124
Appendix E: Initial Codes .....	125

## List of Tables

Table 1. Steps in the Grounded Theory Study .....	39
Table 2. Demographics of Participants.....	48
Table 3. Breakdown of Participants: Traditional Age versus Non-Traditional Age.....	49
Table 4. Race of Participants .....	49
Table 5. Codes Relating to Family Influences .....	55
Table 6. Codes Relating to Economic Factors .....	64
Table 7. Codes Relating to Social Factors .....	72
Table 8. Breakdown of Instances of Sources and Focused Codes .....	80

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Community college enrollment cycle and decision-making. ....	89
------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

## Abstract

The male to female gender gap in higher education continues to average around 40% to 60%. This is a significant societal statistic that will continue to define generations to come and influence the demographics of the workforce and social roles. This Conflict Resolution study strove to find an answer to what are the societal influences impacting male enrollment in a community college in southwest Florida and to explore the role of conflict in prospective male students' decision-making related to higher education. This question was broken down into sub-areas involving gender roles and society. The study was conducted using a grounded theory approach with an intensive interviewing style. From a larger group of potential interviewees, 17 volunteer participants were selected. The selected participants were enrolled at a southwest Florida community college. As with a grounded theory study, initial coding was used to study fragments of data. This was followed by the second phase of focused coding. During the focused coding phase, the most significant and/or frequent codes were used to sift through and analyze large amounts of data. Memo writing was used to help informally track and chart the important records and data findings thus far in the research process. This study will help high school and college administrators better understand how young males can be better prepared to make a decision to go to college or how to skillfully identify another path to a meaningful life after high school without the conflict of societal views.

## Chapter 1

### **Statement of the Problem**

Historically, colleges and universities were considered male institutions until at least the 1850s when women's colleges began to be established; and males continued to be the predominant gender at colleges into the 1970s. However, in recent decades, this trend has notably reversed, with significantly more women than men attending college (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera 2014, p. 1). While the inclusion of women in higher education was long overdue, even in the 1850s, the timeline does show that the overall decline in male enrollment across the board in higher education is an alarming concern. Harper and Harris (2010) offer the following statement which supports the need and rationale of this study:

Those who ask, "What will a focus on college men mean for enduring efforts to ensure the fair, respectful, and equitable treatment of women," should be labeled gender realists, not skeptics. Although our focus is on men, our greater plea is for the closing of gendered outcomes gaps in postsecondary education. We simply want to make clear that men have gender too. Thus, the ongoing quest for gender equity should also be inclusive of them and responsive of their challenges (p. 5).

The current literature lacks the rigorous study of why men are, or are not, enrolling in college from the lens of men's issues as they relate to social views and men's perceptions of themselves. With college enrollment continuing to see an increased difference in male versus female enrollment, this issue continues to need further investigation (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014, p. 1). While the achievements of

females are to be celebrated, as a society, we must continue to study and understand the factors behind males not enrolling in college in similar percentages to the past.

As our society continues to grow to a more global interconnected world, men need the skills and abilities to transition to the future. Skills taught in college such as interpersonal communication, business development skills, ethics and social tolerance and understanding of different cultures have become a necessity for the future. Those with young sons, the researcher included, should be anticipating the world in which their sons will need professional skills. Laying the foundation for a college education may either prepare them directly for a career, or simply act as a developmental addition to a trade or technical skill. How can this problem further be defined? As society continues to develop into a world of interdependent global networks, all member groups of society need to strive to be on equal grounds of understanding and development. While men falling behind in higher education enrollment is not the only factor which needs to be studied in the new societal framework, it is the focus of this research. Men do not need to attend college to be successful in life, or to adapt to an ever-changing environment; however, college does provide the foundation not only for future employment but also for an understanding of different cultures, feelings, and thought processes. .

The impact on some men of not going to college may be reduced chances of gainful employment, while others will miss out on the development of personal skills which will help them in a new multi-cultural society. The impact on society will be a major demographic not prepared with the tools to be successful, both in technical work skills and the ability to communicate and work effectively with diverse populations. While the participants of this study are those who are attending college, the data give us

results which show the conflict barriers which they faced at a younger age, while in the traditional college decision making years of approximately 17-19. Some participants were recently, or still, in that age range, while others were in that age range as much as 40 years ago, providing a strong cross-section of data.

The goal of this study was to explore the conflict factors that may impact male enrollment in community colleges within the southwest Florida region. Using data collected through a grounded theory study, the study investigated how the following factors contribute to the gender gap in community college: (a) identification as first time in college, (b) relationship with father or other male role model(s), (c) perception of higher education at the point of high school graduation, (d) perception of a male's role in his family, and (e) short-term versus long-term payoff of full-time employment. These data points were included in the interview questions as findings to better understand the research questions for this study. The gender gap that currently exists in undergraduate community college enrollment within the United States has, on average, reached or exceeded the ratio of 60:40 female to male (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014, p. 1). This ratio shows that females are outpacing males in initial enrollment in post-secondary education in today's society, although women are still not paid and promoted equally with men in the workplace. Specifically, the topic of males in college has not been studied in depth when it comes to the deep emotional impact that societal views create in the decision-making process to attend college. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors of societal and gender conflicts that have contributed to this gap in higher education enrollment.



The study used a qualitative approach utilizing interview data from 17 undergraduate, first-time-in-college males enrolled at a public community college to explore and theorize their journey through their higher education decision-making. The exact demographics of the participants were not known until after the data were collected and analyzed. The data were collected via the interview process and subsequently analyzed using the coding data analysis methods associated with a grounded theory study.

The study of the gender gap in post-secondary education is a research area in need of expansion. It is important to study and understand the contributing factors given that the gender gap of 60:40 female to male has become widespread at post-secondary institutions. The existing research, which is presented in the literature review section, does not sufficiently explain the true societal conflicts or circumstances in which gender roles stemming from both contemporary and past societal norms have affected males' decisions to enroll in college. The greatest justification for this study is the great societal need to understand the trend of males falling behind females in post-secondary enrollment. This study will add to the existing literature by analyzing the nexus of the influences that affect men's college enrolment decisions with that of conflict in their lives caused by social interactions and personal experiences.

#### Definition and Perception of Conflict

Wilmot and Hocker (2007) define conflict as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals (p.9). As the researcher I define conflict in a similar manner but with the recognition that the parties may not be individual people

but can be a feeling, like lack of self-confidence. Conflict can also be defined as a group of individuals like family or friends. In this study the struggle of conflict begins with the individual male student. The second party to the conflict may be a group such as a family as a whole or an individual such as a single family member or friend. However, the second party may also be non-family member or close friend, or it can also be a financial conflict such as a want or need of money. Schellenberg (1996) supports this as defining conflict as:

Individual characteristics theories, which look at social conflict in terms of natures or the individuals involved; social process theories, which look at conflict as a process of social interaction between individuals or groups; and social structural theories, which look at conflict as a product of the way society is formed and organized (p. 15).

The preceding definitions of conflict shape this study. The conflict relationship between men and external influences is evident in the data collection and analysis of the study. The findings show that many conflict relationships shape men's decision-making on college, both positive and negative.

### **Research Questions**

This study was structured to answer the following central research questions:

1. What societal factors seem to account for lower male enrollment in public community colleges?
2. What are the conflict factors in the decision-making process of young men when considering whether or not to enroll?

The central research questions were broken down into the following sub-questions:

- What traditional gender roles play a part in males' decisions to enroll in community college within the southwest Florida region?
- What are the characteristics of these traditional gender roles and are they viewed consistently by all of the participants in the research study?
- If male community college students feel that societal gender views influenced and introduced personal conflict into their higher education decision-making, what role, if any, did economic factors play?

### **Outline of Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first provides a statement of the problem, research questions, and an outline of the dissertation. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methods, including forms of data collection and how the data was analyzed. Chapter 4 highlights the results and analysis, while Chapter 5 presents the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### **Current Gender Roles and Conflict**

The subject of gender roles in society played a significant part in the research and development of this study, expressly, how males view themselves when it pertains to their roles in society and the part that conflict plays in defining such roles. The conflict of where their place in gender society fits can impact directly how males decide to pursue higher education, or whether they pursue it at all.

How are men being viewed in terms of current gender equity? The following quote shows that scholars are noticing possible gaps occurring between the genders not just in academia but in professional settings as well. Cheney (2013) stated that: “Though huge strides have been made toward gender equity in past years, men seem to be missing from the conversation. It amazes me to be at a professional development function where I am the only man present, a colleague said” (p. 1). This piece of literature goes on to describe how men actually can benefit from participating in or supporting gender equity. Cheney went on to explain that some of the benefits of working towards gender equity include “healthier and happier opposite sex relationships, raising children in an environment of opportunity and equality, and the idea that their mothers, wives, daughters, and nieces might be positively affected by their efforts” (p. 1). While this article paints a positive picture of why men should be concerned with female equity (a very valid and important concern), it does very little to describe how men are viewing themselves in gender equity, focusing instead on how they are participating in female gender equity. The missing piece of the literature is where men feel they are positioned

within gender equity, and their honest assessments of those positions, not just participating in them.

Meyerhoff (2011) stated that while many couples now work 8-hour jobs outside the home, women, on average, spend an additional four hours at home doing “domestic” work while men only spend 20 minutes after work doing the same type of domestic work. If males see this type of data from research the assumption can be made that they simply will view the disparity as the norm and continue in that manner of behavior. What happens when we look at the perspective society has on males and the changing role of males in society? “Over the past century, gender roles have blurred, leading to some women developing more masculine qualities by necessity...and some men developing stronger feminine qualities, like sensitivity and compassion” (“Are men being neutered,” 2012, para 3). The article goes on to state:

In 2010, there were 154,000 ‘house dads,’ a number that has been climbing steadily since 2007, according to the Census Bureau. What began as a small trend of choice, as wives outdistanced their husbands in earnings, has become one of economic necessity in many families. (“Are men being neutered,” 2012, para. 5)

Literature such as this can also lead to supporting the problem of societal gender issues as titles and points of views may add to the overall issues. Stereotypes of this manner continue to perpetuate the problem. This societal trend can be viewed as partially affected by the economic downturn that began around 2007. The trend of “house dads,” however, began moving in this direction prior to 2007, which indicates that other factors also must be playing a part in the changing male role in society and family. A goal of the

research questions was to determine if a role such as “house dad” influences the decision to attend college.

### **Family Dynamics and Men’s Roles**

While some children are living in families where fathers now are staying home while mothers are in the workforce, many children have mothers in the workforce but simply do not have fathers at home or in their lives at all. Does this absence in their lives play a part in higher education decisions later in life? “About half of American children will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent family, and most of these children will be living without their father. Will they be worse off for their fathers’ absence?” (DeBell, 2007, p. 427). DeBell’s (2007) research studies the educational well-being of children living without their fathers; however, the research does not directly address higher education. The piece further discussed the need for more scholarly review in this area, as De Bell stated, “The father-present vs. father-absent comparison is standard in public discourse, but rare in research” (p. 428). This study included the question of whether fathers were present in the participant’s childhood and attempted to draw conclusions with the findings. DeBell further remarked, “Though most research has not measured father absence per se, there is no indirect evidence that children living without fathers may be disadvantaged on a wide range of indicators of well-being, including health, educational experiences, and academic performance” (p. 428).

This issue appears not to be unique to the United States; it also is found in other developed countries. Have men been left behind in perpetual adolescence, some researchers may ask? Rutherford (2012) wrote an article about this topic in relation to gender conflict from the perspective of the United Kingdom. Rutherford stated, “Millions

of skilled working-class jobs that once gave men status and purpose have gone. The male solidarity that was the backbone of the labour movement has gone” (para. 11). In a related piece, Pougnet, Serbin, Stack, Ledingham, and Schwartzman (2012) stated, “Fathers’ absence is a pattern that shows generational continuity, most notably within disadvantaged populations” (p. 540). How does social class and standing in the economy impact the higher education decision-making of men? This was included in the current research to study the effect of the male experience in childhood as it relates to fathers and later to higher education decisions. Pougnet et al. (2012) also stated, “Fathers’ absence in one generation’s childhood predicted fathers’ absence for their children more than 20 years later in a culturally unique North American population” (p. 552). This finding may have direct results on higher education decisions given the similar timeframe of 18-20 years.

In relation to the decision to enroll in college, society may continue to produce mixed messages on whether a male’s place is in the workforce, at home, or in school. Evergreen (2013) stated, “Stay-at-home fathers have long born the heavy reputation of being incompetent or incapable of being the primary caretaker within a household. Men, it seems, are supposed to be the hunters - the breadwinners, the ones who go out in the wild and bring food to the table” (para. 1). Not helping the cause for men’s perspectives of themselves are the statistics that indicate that “more than 50% of people believe that children are better off if a mother stays at home and is jobless. Inversely, only 8% will say the same about fathers” (Evergreen, 2013, para. 4). The current study explored the effects of these developments in our society on male enrollment in community college to

determine if societal changes are driving a higher percentage of males not to enroll in community college, at least right after high school graduation.

Women have reached, or already have surpassed, men in completion of many academic degree areas. In a study by McGinley (2013) for Boston University Law Review, she stated that “women today earn approximately sixty percent of undergraduate and master’s degrees and nearly half of all professional degrees in law and medicine” (p. 796). In conjunction with the educational statistics, her research stated that both American and international workplaces “are changing so rapidly that women will soon occupy the most powerful positions” (McGinley, 2013, p. 796). Nonetheless, women’s empowerment should not be misunderstood as a factor working to the detriment of men. Women still are outpaced by men in terms of overall pay equality and gender equality in promotions. Yeboah, Serbeh, and Bembir (2015) stated that, “though it is undisputed that women have been underprivileged, the insipient emergence of ‘men in crisis’ in development discourse may suggest that policies have not benefited all men either” (p. 36).

“Characteristics traditionally associated with women such as empathy and consensus building are more valuable to business than the more competitive ‘masculine’ model or the brawny ‘masculine’ strength necessary for many blue-collar manufacturing jobs” (McGinley, 2013, p. 796). Are men at fault for an “inability to ‘retool’ or to adjust to the new economy?” (McGinley, 2013, p. 796). If so, what is the cause of this situation, and would immediate enrollment in community college, rather than going into the workforce after high school, help close this gap? The literature fails to explore fully the idea that men, as a whole, are not adjusting to a “new economy,” if they are able to break



away from traditional gender binaries that may define them. It is my hope that the findings of this study provided evidence for whether this is a verifiable idea.

### **Brief Synopsis of Community Colleges in the United States**

Community colleges in the United States serve an important purpose in today's higher education landscape. Students attend community colleges for various reasons, which is unique to these institutions. Students at community colleges can be pursuing technical certificates in areas like mechanics or CPR certification, completing a general education degree with plans to transfer to a four year university, or simply looking to take a few classes for personal enrichment. With this array of options, public community colleges consist of a diverse student body that comes with challenges and opportunities alike.

Community colleges in the United States have changed and developed over the last half century. "In the early twentieth century, university leaders created the community college as an institutional effort to expand access to higher education. The first community colleges were junior colleges housed in high schools" (Topper & Powers, 2013, p. 2). According to Johnston (2010), the term junior college was used widely prior to 1950, and the term community college was popularized in 1950 by Jesse R. Bouge, a former executive secretary of the American Association of Community Colleges. "As the number of community colleges grew, they developed an identity that was separate from their 4-year counterparts. Initially, most junior colleges viewed themselves as 'feeders' for the four-year schools" (Johnston, 2010, p. 36).

When discussing and researching community colleges, it is important to understand some of the facts and figures associated with today's institutions. According

to the 2016 American Association of Community College Fact Sheet, there was a total of 1,108 community colleges in the United States as of the fall of 2014, 982 of which were public institutions. In terms of the student population, 62% were part-time, while 38% were full-time. The average age of the students was 28, with a median age of 24. Thirty-six percent of these students were first generation college students. Finally, as is the major focus of the current study, 57% were women and 43% were men (American Association of Community College Fact Sheet, 2016). In addition, it helps to have an understanding of the makeup of the administration of community colleges to try to understand how these administrators may relate to students. According a survey of community college administrators by Basham, Campbell, and Mendoza (2008), the respondents were 56% female, 44% male, 51% of the Baby boomer generation, 25% Generation X, 16% Millennials, and 8% Traditional (pre-1946) (p. 56).

### **Changes Facing Community Colleges**

Higher education in the United States today faces numerous challenges and opportunities for improvement. Some areas that are discussed regularly today include shrinking budgets, mostly from cash-strapped state funding, the question of whether higher education still is worth the price tag, and the continually rising costs of tuition. All institutions, including community colleges, must review their offerings and costs to ensure they are staying competitive in today's education climate. Community colleges may be in a unique position because they offer lower cost tuition as well as many degree programs designed to shorten the length of time it takes to study and enter the workforce. Basham et al. (2008) stated, "America's community colleges today are at a crossroads. Aging buildings, massive retirements, decreased funding and fluctuating enrollments

have seemingly set the stage for the ‘change or die’ scenario” (p. 26). Basham et al. (2008), went on to discuss how alternate sources of funding from areas such as community and for-profit organizations, in support of new academic areas that would parallel their missions, first were viewed as positive by the administration; however, tensions soon rose as faculty began to question the roles of these organizations on their campuses. Transferability into 4-year programs also was a concern with outside influence on academic offerings. Along with declining male enrollment on community college campuses, these concerns have become an area of interest for the institutions. Research in these areas will assist in forming an understanding of why males are lagging behind females in enrollment and possibly begin to reverse that trend by proposing new class and degree offerings.

As with all higher education institutions, community colleges also are facing a new possible funding measurement. Many state-funded community colleges may begin to be assessed based on performance. In summary, this means that, as opposed to being funded on the amount of enrollment, schools will be funded based on performance factors such as graduation rates and retention. This may be especially challenging at open enrollment community colleges. D’Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, and Thornton (2014) stated:

The rationale behind the implementation of performance measures in higher education, including community colleges, is largely driven by two main reasons: the desire to hold higher education accountable and a decline in state tax revenue for higher education. The perception is that the quest for efficiency will lead to an environment whereby institutions can achieve goals with less state funding. (p. 238)

With this type of funding on the horizon, or already starting in some states such as Florida, the need for institution officials to understand their student population, including any gender disparities, becomes all the more important. If males are enrolling at lower rates, there also will be a need to study how retention is working for or against them and how that impacts performance factors for the colleges. While the point of this study was not to study retention, it is important to understand performance-based funding whenever specific demographic groups are being analyzed. Institutions will now be held directly financially accountable for retention, graduation, and performance rates of all students. If these institutions do not focus on the unique needs of students of all demographics, all parties will be negatively affected. In order to combat continued smaller male enrollment, it will be important for institutions to not ignore unique needs of this population as well. Colleges will be quick to implement plans to improve programs and processes which improve performance measures, especially when finances are at stake. Understanding the possible roadblocks of male students will be vital to the master planning of the institution.

Finally, what if men decide not to go to college at all? Is that an issue? As noted, colleges did not always exist to serve the masses, or even the academic elite. According to Malong (2012):

For a long time, American schools were not too academically choosy, instead picking out the sons of gentlemen farmers, the new republic's base of power. Top schools stayed blue-blooded well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The gates finally flew open almost 70 years ago, with the GI bill sending to college millions of men who otherwise wouldn't have dreamed of it, and millions of women and minorities

eventually followed suit by the mid-1970's. Since then, the pressures and rewards surrounding college have only grown. (p. 74)

Can some males be successful without college? Examples come to mind as some professional athletes or those with a built in talent for entrepreneurship. However, in most cases, if one does not have a natural talent or the skills to be successful at a trade, higher education is still the key to what would be considered as leading a financially independent life. College also can act as the key to qualitative learning with social and emotional well-being as a vital part of life. It is certainly acceptable to not attend college; however, it is generally agreed upon that successful college attendance has a greater positive influence than not. The concern is to target the factors to help males who decide to not go to college and who do not have the previously mentioned natural talent or skills to be successful without college be successful members of society. As a society, we need to understand how to assist them and not let them fall through the gap that exists between these two options.

### **Gender in Social Discourse**

In the field of conflict resolution, the questions surrounding the gender gap in college can be analyzed through the consideration of the impact of gender affairs in social discourse. How does society view males in terms of educational and occupational goals and how has this changed since 1970, when researchers tend to agree that the traditional gender roles in society started to shift in the public's view? Do we stop at educational and occupational goals? What about obtaining a higher level of learning just for the ability to better one's intellect? I wanted to see if the data show that discourse in society is having an impact on males' goals for self-fulfillment and success, whether gauged by education,

occupation and wealth, or personal fulfillment. Two additional questions should be considered as well: (a) Do men feel that going straight to college, rather than directly to a working-class job, feminizes them in societies' view? (b) Do other factors such as race and socioeconomic standing play a part in these potential views?

How has social discourse grown along with the changing gender roles in society and what does that mean for the gender gap in college? As described by van Dijk (1997), "Discourse analysis in general recognizes that discourse is always embedded in a particular social context. For some scholars, this may mean studying a society's mode of social stratification in relation to the language practices of its members" (p. 66). Are males experiencing social discourse and is it affecting their choices regarding enrollment in college? While this is good general information concerning gender and social discourse, there is still more that needs to be studied and understood about how changing societal gender roles and views are affecting males' college enrollment.

The topic of societal views of males can be broadened when we ask the question, "Whose societal views of men, and why does it matter?" Van Dijk (1997) made the statement, "In two US middle schools and one junior high school, it was examined how teachers selection of romance novels for girls and adventures and mystery books for boys encouraged 'gendered' reading practices among their students" (p. 71). This type of gender "directing" from an authority figure such as a middle or junior high teacher contributes to continued advocacy for gender stereotyping. It is my belief that interactions like this, beginning at a young age, influence males for the remainder of their lives and shape how they view themselves and where they fall into place in society. These circumstances follow males as a result of a conflicting social discourse and cause

still unknown effects on the future of the male population's educational, occupational, and self-fulfilling goals and outlooks.

### **Labor Specific Example of Social Change**

The literature finds many different theories and examples of why there may be gender gaps in higher education; however, it is important to find a specific example of a study that presents hard data regarding a profession requiring a college education. Tanner and Cockerill (1996) described the narrowing gender gap of the pharmacy profession, which has been traditionally dominated by males. The study clearly shows statistics that indicate that males in the pharmacy profession are getting older, while the females in the profession are younger, per data from both the United States and Canada. Because pharmacy is a field that requires a college degree, this is an important aspect to study in terms of social change. The data presented by the authors is clear and informative, and it presents examples of why this trend is happening: the older males are prepping for retirement and the younger females are filling in the gap that is being created by this phenomenon. This study does not present reasons as to why younger males are not filling in the gap themselves. If lack of a college education is keeping them from the profession, what are the factors that are contributing to this?

### **Males' Perceptions of Themselves**

The perceptions that males have of themselves might be derived from two sources. First, they may be derived from their feelings of how society views males. Alternatively, they may be formed from deeper personal roots stemming from family circumstances and upbringing.

Gender polarization operates in two related ways. First, it defines mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female. Second, it defines any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts as problematic - as unnatural or immoral from a religious perspective or as biologically anomalous or psychologically pathological from a scientific perspective. (Bem, 1993, pp. 80-81)

This description summarizes the root of the issue that the current research studied. The review of literature begins to compare and contrast as to what exists in current research. The topic of gender roles is discussed in letter to the editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* titled "Where are the Male Community College Students? Where are the Female Auto-Mechanics" ("Where Are the Male," 2002). The central argument of this article is that males may be more hurt, in the long run, without a degree in higher education. The article describes how males may enter more blue-collar jobs right out of high school and then, as they age, find that they can no longer function in this role and do not have the education to help them gain employment in a less physical occupation. Females, conversely, according to the letter realize that they may be stopped at the clerical level of employment without a college education. While the theme of the article is clear and the idea that females without a college education cannot get past a clerical position is unfounded, the article could have provided more explanation of this topic. However, this article supports the fact that traditional gender roles in society may be keeping males from going to college because they feel that the blue-collar job, which may be better paying at a young age, may be more appealing from the start when at least four years of college is required before starting an entry level professional job. The goal



of this research was to elaborate and find *if* there is concrete evidence of males with this outlook on their educational or career goals and perspectives.

The effect of the media and popular culture on males' outlooks on themselves is also an arena that has been written about in the gender conflict context. Bennett (2011) described that in his research he found males are falling behind females in success rates in graduating with a college degree and becoming successfully employed in a sustaining job. A surprising, and revealing, idea from this text were the statistics showing that males between the ages of 18-34 spend more time playing video games than males between the ages of 12-17. This type of belief raises some alarms to me as some in society seem to make broad generalizations that college-age males are causing a detriment to themselves by being lazy and playing video games. My goal, therefore, was to better understand the actual factors that are contributing to males falling behind females in the path to completing a college degree.

The concept of males feeling a need to "control their destiny" is a topic that is broached in this area of study as well. Existing literature describes a stereotype in which males tend to rebel against, or distrust, authoritative figures, including teachers and professors. This is described as males feeling a sense of weakness if they rely on others to make them a success. In relation to the current study, males may feel a sense of weakness when relying on college to make them successful. Magolda (1992) wrote about focusing on learning styles and patterns in college, with emphasis on a particular study involving gender related issues. The most significant topic of the text was the outlook difference between the sexes. The author described a pattern of male self-responsibility and a distrust of authority; males feel the need to control their own destiny. However, more

research would be needed in order to prove that this is a valid male outlook and, furthermore, that the outlook is exclusive to, or strongly skewed in favor of, males. A point was made that females in the study tended to embrace personal connections, build relationships, and work through their academic careers with partnerships and trust-building. It appears that the author was targeting college professors with an interest in gender differences in higher education for the purpose of realizing different behavioral patterns of the sexes. The author emphasized different trends throughout the students' four to five years in college and how they may adapt and change. The author did not make any assumptions regarding sexual orientation in the results. This seems to support the idea that the data was based solely on gender and not affected by sexual orientation and demonstrates that perceived gender roles may be common amongst individuals who identify of the same gender, male or female, but may have differing sexual orientations such as gay or straight. There does not appear to be any discernible bias in the text or obvious omissions of information. The data collection methods used were interviews of four males and four females at periodic times, ranging from their freshman year to their senior year in college, and the results were tabulated in a qualitative style.

Perception was studied through the lens of how males and females write in college in the research by Deats and Lenker (1994). The authors explored the differences in gender views among college students, especially from a female point of view. The study allows the reader to draw value from the comparison of what is being written about gender by female college students to what would be perceived by a male reader in college. The authors were attempting to describe that females tended to use more terms in academic gender writing, such as "affirmative action," and similar terms that embrace

cohesiveness, such as “we” instead of “I.” The authors attempted to show that female authors use these terms more than males, which might portray males as more individualistic or unwilling to compromise or work in teams to solve a problem. This is a perception that may hurt the male outlook or view from the outside as they may be perceived as unwilling to collaborate for a greater cause if shown to just be concerned with themselves and not caring about others. The authors emphasized these points but also assumed that this individualistic view of males has a negative connotation. Additionally, the authors insinuated that males are less social than women. The data gathered seem valid from a raw collection standpoint because they were from surveys and continued studies at a state university. However, the presentation of the results leads to questions of bias in the collection of the data due to the authors’ style of portraying the characteristics of individualism and independence with a negative connotation.

Lastly, on the subject of males and self-perceptions, literature has been written regarding the changing demographics of college majors and the comparison of females and males in those roles. England and Li (2006) described research that shows that females have surpassed males in bachelor’s degree completion and are catching up in the male dominated areas such as math and science. The main concept driving this article is the data findings showing that, beginning in 1982, the number of females completing bachelor’s degrees surpassed males, and, at the same time, the number of women moving in to traditionally male dominated degrees, such as business and technology, started to grow. The authors were attempting to make statistical sense out of the continued dominance of female enrollment and degree completion in higher education in comparison to that of males. The intended audience was students studying sociological

issues and gender relation at the university level. The authors emphasized the enrollment statistics of women entering the traditional male areas of science and math, but also acknowledge that males still outpace females in this area, although to a lesser degree. Since the data span from 1971 to 2002, an assumption also was made, by the authors, that the population of college enrollees did not change much in the 31 years in terms of other influential factors assumed to be sociological as well demographic factors such as gender and race. This is a weakness in the authors' data findings due to the large timeframe and assuming that demographics had not changed within it. While it does not appear that there was bias or slant in the research, I believe that attention should have been given to the type of institutions that were studied (e.g., private, public, historically black colleges and universities [HBCUs], etc.) and the relation of the genders and degrees that were studied. This can be considered an obvious omission in the analysis. Although the evidence supports the main concept of the authors that exact social and demographic factors leading to gender gaps in college are still undefined.

In terms of perception, the act of "putting on a show" by males in order to try and fulfill the role(s) in which they feel society has an expectation for them should be considered. One such study is entitled "Putting My Man Face On" by Edwards and Jones (2009). The study sampled 35 male participants at a large unnamed East Coast research university. The study found that a majority of the men, regardless of their sexual orientation, felt pressure to act in the roles of a man as defined by society. This pressure was felt even if the participant did not feel they met that role. The study used a social context from the External Expectations of What It Means To Be a Man scale as well as three phases from Performing Masculinity According to External Expectations scale.

These phases include (a) feeling a need to put on a mask, (b) wearing a mask, (c) experiencing and recognizing consequences of wearing a mask, and (d) beginning to transcend external expectations (Edwards & Jones, 2009, p. 124). This study provided a strong outline and model for the current study. While the Edwards and Jones study focused on four-year universitymen's expectations of what it means to be a male in society, my study focused on how those expectations impact male community college enrollment and, like the Edwards and Jones study, what the expectations and consequences of these decisions are.

### **Factors of Campus Life: Professors, Majors, Distractions?**

The campus environment is a factor that also needs to be studied when considering the challenges that may exist for males and college enrollment. Have programs that were organized in the past to boost female enrollment actually, over time, started to hamper male enrollment? Have policies or practices by administration and/or professors inadvertently affected male enrollment? One article speaks about the admissions process and gender affirmative action. Bailey's (2009) main point revolved around the fact that current college admissions and bachelor's degree completion rates are both around 60% female. The author posed attempting the question of why it would be wrong for college admissions to ensure equal numbers of each gender through college practices similar to the way affirmative action practices ensure proportionately equal numbers of racial groups in a respective academic make-up. The argument against this practice is based on the fear that colleges admitting less-qualified males as opposed to more-qualified females may violate Title IX regulations barring sexual discrimination in higher education. The author emphasized the idea that affirmative action for gender

should be as allowable as is the practice of affirmative action for racial purposes. There appears to be some bias favoring males in this scenario due to the author implying that any appropriate actions should be taken in order to keep the gender admissions numbers equitable, even if it means admitting less-qualified males. This stance could be construed as the author possibly being against qualified females. However, it seems as if the author was striving only to make the point that either affirmative action should exist in all cases or in no cases at all. This is a flawed theory as affirmative action and Title IX are intended to empower historically oppressed groups.

The idea of faculty as role models serves as a relevant research topic as well. Bettinger and Long (2005) explored this topic in their study of the influence of female professors on their female students. The point was made that while females currently outperform males in most measured academic instances, they still lag behind in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The study suggested, however, that female professors may help female students in persisting in these areas. The authors were attempting to define the connection that females may have in the academic area. The intended audience of the article seemed to be those interested in gender, academic, and STEM-related studies and publications. Emphasis was put on a comparison of female academics between humanities and STEM-related areas, and the study and article seem to be based on an assumption that the audience would understand what differences might exist between these two areas of academic study. There does not seem to be bias or slant in the article. The data and evidence was derived from quantitative research using proportions of courses in different subject areas compared to the gender of the course professors. The question bears asking, if the STEM areas are one

of the fastest growing areas of higher education, does a renewed focus on female enrollment have a negative impact on male enrollment as administrators focus already limited resources on one group over the other ? Despite the questions raised by this study, including whether focus should be put back on males' STEM enrollment, with females as an underrepresented demographic in STEM, the focus should be on their enrollment.

### **Males and Community College Enrollment**

Community college enrollment was a focus of my current dissertation study, and the participants in the interviews for data collection were from a Florida public community college. Harper and Harris (2010) stated, "In 2006, men represented 41.4 percent of students enrolled at two-year colleges and earned 38.4 percent of associate degrees awarded" (p. 156). The authors asked an important question: "what prior gender socialization experiences do men bring with them to college?" (Harper & Harris, 2010, p. 66). The research identified that the decision made by community college males to go to college is influenced largely by the family structure, whether positive or negative; it continued on to acknowledge the strong impact that male peer groups have on this population. According to the authors, the male peer groups are tied mostly to school, and their research showed that focusing on studying, homework, and academic research are seen as feminine and thus do not conform to the desired or societally expected image of a male.

Harper and Harris (2010) stated that because previous scholars have focused on university males, not much is known regarding community college males and their gender-related developments (p. 68). They drew the relationship between males' involvement in extra-curricular activities and academic success. This involvement often

is viewed as feminine, which inhibits many males from participating, thus possibly creating a lower success rate academically. Male gender role conflict (MGRC) is described as when males perceive certain actions to be feminine or gay. (Harper & Harris, 2010, p. 73). However, the intense need for success in the form of degree completion leading to lucrative careers is what fuels some males to enroll in higher education. Instead of not pursuing higher education at all, some males may be predisposed to stress and chemical abuse to calm their anxiety (Harper & Harris, 2010). This phenomenon has a negative result on males attempting to understand their role in society.

### **The Need for Shifting the Study**

Current literature shows that until the mid-1990s, many scholars who studied gender issues still were concentrating on the needs of women (Townsend, 2008). These studies began to change after 2000, as the research began to focus on the impact that higher female enrollment had on males in the classroom. Townsend (2008) stated that, while universities are altering their admissions criteria to accept more men in order to even out gender ratios, community colleges, as open enrollment institutions, do not have that same luxury because of the lack of selective admissions. Interestingly enough, research also has shown that among women, the gender gap in college is not affected as much by race and income as it is for males (Harper and Harris, 2010, p. 385). This poses the question of what other elements of income and race may be influencing male college enrollment that are not affecting female college enrollment. Further studies need to be completed in order to determine not only why females are more successful in community college, but why males are not as successful. This study should not be confused with an



idea that suggests that women's empowerment and success has come at the expense of males; this was not my point of view as a researcher. Duflo (2012) stated, "women are currently worse-off than men, and this inequity between genders is repulsive in its own right" (p. 106). With this study, I was encouraged by the successes of women, with much ground yet to be made up, while simultaneously watching cautiously the status of men.

### **Male Success at the Community College Level: Racial Factors?**

Much of the current research about higher education gender gaps focuses on male to female issues; however, only some of the studies address possible racial factors. Does the race of the male have an effect on their college enrollment and/or success in college? Perrakis (2008) stated, "recent demographic studies, national education statistics, and admissions data reveal that fewer male students of any race or ethnicity are enrolling in college, a trend that is roughly three decades old" (p. 17). Across all races, African-American men had the lowest ratio to African-American women when it comes to college enrollment. The current study included race as a possible intersectional factor to the college gender gap. The study of gender conflict in relation to racially diverse male college enrollment seems to be a topic that is hinted at on the surface of research findings, but is not readily explained or presented as a main cause of possible gender conflict. Harper and Harris (2010) described four different racially diverse community college students and their personal, professional, and educational experiences. The first example was that of a working class Caucasian mechanic. This community college student missed out on an athletic scholarship after a motorcycle accident ended his athletic career. After high school he became a mechanic and made enough money for his girlfriend to stay at home with their two children. Although initially deterred, he enrolled

in a community college but questioned his actions because he had to cut his work hours, which resulted in his girlfriend needing to start a part-time job. The second example involved a struggling Asian male whose family had close family ties and valued education highly. The student's father wanted him to follow the family tradition and complete a degree in accounting. However, the student's passion was in writing. Not wanting to disappoint his father, the student enrolled in an accounting program but began to struggle academically because he did not find passion in what he was studying. The third is the example of a Latino who made the decision in high school to finish his diploma even though his group of popular friends called him a sissy or a girl for pursuing his education. Upon his father being diagnosed with a terminal illness, he decided to enroll at a community college so he could provide for his mother and two younger sisters. At times, however, he questioned if that was a good alternative to starting a full-time job straight out of high school. The fourth and final example is a closeted African American gay achiever. This community college male was achieving high academic success and was involved in almost every student club on campus, but he was incredibly conflicted about his sexual orientation. His family was close and very religious, and he feared that if they knew he was gay it would bring shame on both him and his family. Although he seemed very successful on the surface, he became very depressed as his conflicts grew. The authors described that while all four of these students are racially different they shared the same conflict of masculinity in terms of college enrollment. These types of examples are based on represented symbols. I believe these examples need to be researched more in depth to understand the various conflicts that college males face every day whether they already are enrolled in college or considering enrolling to pursue a

degree or technical degree for the first time. I do believe, however, that the authors successfully identified some of the main conflicts college males face today, a result which this dissertation attempted to define as well.

The literature researched and presented attempts to identify a variety of factors that may be affecting males and college enrollment. The research suggests that there are many variables that are causing this trend in higher education. In summary, there are several themes in what is a non-cohesive collection of research. One is that males are attempting to define themselves within society's perceived gender roles. This is a factor this researcher feels needs to be framed in a new manner so as to not portray female success as a cause of male struggles. An additional theme in the available research is the changing factors and environments of community colleges and if the larger enrollment of females and larger number of female professors and administrators has an impact on males. Again, these findings provide only a simple attempt at an explanation of the question and do not provide a deeper academic analysis. The findings of this literature suggest that many external factors are occurring, none of which are fully interconnected or provide a cohesive explanation of the causes of the gender gap in community college. It was my hope that after conducting the interview process with current first-time college students, that new data findings would emerge that will help to better define personal and social conflicts male college students have to navigate. What was found, as a result of the study, is that men are facing gender stereotyping when making major life decisions, including attending college. In many instances, men do not even realize that this stereotyping is occurring.

This study was structured to answer the following central research questions:

1. What societal factors seem to account for lower male enrollment in public community colleges?
2. What are the conflict factors in the decision-making process?

The central research questions were broken down into the following sub-questions:

- What traditional gender roles play a part in males' decisions to enroll in community college within the southwest Florida region?
- What are the characteristics of these traditional gender roles and are they viewed consistently by all of the participants in the research study?
- If male community college students feel that societal gender views influenced and introduced personal conflict into their higher education decision making, what role, if any, did economic factors play?

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this study. It also discusses ethics and expected contributions of the study. Chapter Three is followed by data analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### Introduction

Based on the rationale for the study, the research questions that drove this study revolved around gender roles in society and how they may affect a male high school graduate's decision to enroll in college. The study also considered what current day societal views of males impact the decision to enter college. The review of the literature indicates that while some studies of the college gender gap exist, more in-depth research is needed to understand how conflicts in societal gender roles contribute to the creation of this gap. Specifically, theories such as gender polarization and patriarchy are subjects that are not readily evident in many of the studies already completed in this area of research, but are relevant in the body of work in the research.

Various studies involving higher education topics have been completed using grounded theory methods. Martinez Dolan, Young, Cesario, and Symes (2015) completed a grounded theory study that "...explored practices used by Hispanic nursing students to promote their academic success during the first semester of a baccalaureate program. Fifteen Hispanic nursing students participated in focus groups and individual interviews" (p. 140). The authors used open-ended questions aligned very closely with those I used for this study to analyze the participants' feelings from the stage of arrival in their academic program through the point of passing, or not passing, their nursing certification exams. Examples of questions asked in the Martinez et al. study were: "What factors/people supported your admission into nursing school?" and "What does success mean to you in terms of academics?" (p. 149). The authors found that "finances, family dynamics, dealing with potential failure, and time management were significant

concerns” (Martinez Dolan et al., 2015 p. 140). As the researcher, I was eager to see if similar areas of concern were found in this grounded theory study.

An additional higher education research study using grounded theory was conducted by Kennedy, Terrell, and Lohle (2015), who analyzed the persistence of students in a limited-residency doctoral program. “The goal of this study was to develop a theory to help understand and explain attrition from a limited-residency doctoral program, specifically, the reasons for attrition by students who had finished coursework and left the program while working on their final dissertation.” (Kennedy et al., 2015, p. 216). In their study the researchers conducted phone interviews to collect their data from 17 participants using an unstructured method but focusing on a central research question. Data analysis was completed using axial codes identified as inadequate dissertation support, participants’ reflections concerning doctoral study, and, lastly, participants’ direct reasons for leaving the program. The study further developed the first axial code (inadequate support) as it was selected by 16 of 17 participants as their primary reason for leaving their doctoral program.

Although both of the previously mentioned studies did not use first-time college students or a gender-based approach, they both were successful studies researching the feelings of college students at various stages of their academic cycle. The number of participants in both of these grounded theory studies also supports my use of at least 15 interviewees.

### **Position of the Literature Review**

The position of the literature review in a grounded theory study is a topic of debate in regards to whether this step should be taken prior to data collection as to not create bias or preconceptions about the research. However, Charmaz (2014) states “Delaying the review encourages you to articulate your ideas. That’s fine in principle. In practice, it can result in rehashing old empirical problems and dismissing the literature” (p. 306). Following the principles and outline for a grounded theory study provided by Charmaz (2014) the literature review was completed prior to data collection due to the researcher’s familiarity and professional experience within the subject matter. The researcher’s biases were considered early in the process and departmentalized as to not affect the data collection or findings of the study. The review of the literature acted as a resource to create empirical data and findings independent of the reviewed literature. Charmaz (2014) supports this stance by stating “Now grounded theorists increasingly recognize that a lack of familiarity with relevant literatures is unlikely and untenable. Researchers typically hold perspectives and possess knowledge in their fields before they decide on a research topic” (p. 306).

### **Rationale for a Qualitative Grounded Theory Study**

According to Charmaz (2014), “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 1). Charmaz discussed how the theorist invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis using comparative methods to keep interaction and involvement with the data and emerging analysis.

Charmaz (2014) compiled a visual representation of the grounded theory process, represented by the following steps:

1. Research Question
2. Recruitment and Sampling of Participants
3. Data Collection
4. Initial Coding
5. Focused Coding and Categorizing
6. Theory Building
7. Writing Up/Dissemination (p. 18)

Grounded theory is a strong fit for this study because the previous research is scattered on this topic. The flexibility brought to the data collection and analysis process by this format is well supported by grounded theory. The ever-evolving process of data collection and analysis allows each participant to voice his feelings and thoughts in what may be viewed as a less structured and more relaxed environment. It was my hope that this would allow for the collection of valuable data true to the participants' feelings and experiences.

In further support of grounded theory, it is important to consider the non-linear nature of a study of this kind. Charmaz (2014) described that a flash of insight or instantaneous realization of analytic connections may happen at any time during the research process and grounded theorists can stop and write whatever ideas occur to them. As a researcher, I feel that this was an important option needed as a part of my study. Reserving the ability to catch details and important statements, which may have a significant impact on the study at any step of the process, was vital to my preferred



methods. Charmaz also described grounded theory methods as a craft that researchers study. I welcomed the ability to shift focus to another area of the research when the flow of the study called for it. The ability then to bring these ideas back together for common, or uncommon, themes is an aspect I found attractive in grounded theory as portrayed by Charmaz.

The theories presented in this study are “grounded” in the data. Charmaz (2014) states “Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis” (pg. 1). Grounded theory, with a constant comparison analysis and memoing, provided a strong fit for this study by comparing existing data and literature with the new and emerging findings of the 17 participants. The existing literature does not address the specifics of this topic and needs additional findings in support of the broader body of knowledge. During the data analysis portion of this study, the researcher’s epistemology created theories derived from the constant comparison of the data and existing theories. As with an epistemological approach, the researcher viewed the participants’ responses as rooted in prior experiences which formed their current views and outlooks on college enrollment and the factors which led them to this step in their lives.

After nearly 15 years of working with college students, I have come to understand that the increased pressures of classes, home and family life, work, and other general responsibilities of everyday life can cause students to be scattered in their thoughts and actions. Due to the potential of participants giving up more of their already limited free time for these interviews, the flexibility of the grounded theory method allows the

researcher to stop at any given time to record and reflect on what may be an important addition to the study and was an important asset during the research.

This study was conducted using a grounded theory approach. Interview sessions were held with 17 college males, who all were first-time college students. According to Creswell (1998), “The centerpiece of grounded theory study research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 56). The goal of this type of study is to form categories, which Creswell defined as “unit[s] of information composed of events, happenings, and instances,” until the categories are saturated (p. 148). The participants were chosen in a theoretical sampling, and met the aforementioned criteria of being males who are enrolled as first-time college students at a southwest Florida public community college. There were no age restrictions. A request was emailed out to a larger group of potential participants, and a group of 17 were randomly selected from the larger group. Simple random sampling was used to choose the minimum 15 participants. A random number generator was used to ensure that at least 15 random participants were chosen out of the larger population of those who responded to the request for participants.

This study used the method of intensive interviewing. Charmaz (2014) described intensive interviewing as:

typically meaning a gently-guided, one-sided conversation that explores research participants’ perspective on their personal experience with the research topic. The topic may be broad and fluid such as the life histories of people who grew up during the Cold War era, or much narrower and more focused such as local

elementary school teachers' views of learning assessment policies and practices.  
(p. 56)

Charmaz (2014) went on to list the key characteristics of intensive interviewing as:

- selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic;
- in-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations;
- reliance on open-ended questions;
- objective of obtaining detailed responses;
- emphasis on understanding the research participant's perspective, meanings, and experience;
- practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, and implicit views and accounts of actions. (p. 88)

Table 1 outlines the steps followed in this grounded theory study.

Table 1

*Steps in the Grounded Theory Study*

Process Step	Action Step
Paradigm	Grounded Theory Study
Methodology	Local College Permission to Conduct Study IRB Academic department approves plan to contact students Recruit Participants Obtain Participants Informed Consent (Appendix B) Agree on Date and Time for Interview
Data Collection Method	Interview Open-Ended, Semi-Structured Recorded Interview with Individual Participants Audio Transcribed
Strategies for Data Analysis and Data Validation	Transcript Immersion through Reading and Re-Reading Identification of Initial Codes Identification of Focused Codes Synthesis and Theoretical Model Development
Outcomes	Development of Substantive Theory and Useable Practical Applications

**Interviews and Process**

As per NSU department guidelines, the interviewer received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study. The academic department at the host college reached out, via email, to students enrolled in the SLS Cornerstone class, which is a college experience developmental course for first-time in college students, asking for volunteers for this study. As parties emailed the researcher indicating interest in participation, the researcher sent each person the informed consent form for full disclosure of the study before the possible participant made a final decision to schedule an interview. If the individual was interested, the researcher scheduled the interview at a

time convenient for the participant and asked the participant to return the signed informed consent form at the time of the interview. No interview began without the signed informed consent form. At the interview, participants were given the chance to ask any questions they may have had prior to the start of the interview. Before the start of the interview, participants again were reminded that the interview would be audio recorded but that no identifying material would be discussed that could jeopardize their anonymity. Interviews then began, which ranged approximately 20 to 60 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 20 minutes due to the participant, although willing to be interviewed, having a class starting shortly after and unable to reschedule. All consent forms and audio recordings are stored in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher has access. All of the data will be destroyed 36 months after the completion of the study, per IRB regulations. All data were coded by the researcher. All interviews were completed with no prior knowledge of, or bias towards, the participants.

Charmaz (2014) stated:

An intensive interview may be conversational, but it follows a different etiquette. A researcher expresses interest and wants to know more. What might be rude to ask or be glossed over in friendly agreement in ordinary conversation - even with intimates - becomes grist for exploration *if and when the research participant consents*. (p. 68)

Consent was determined, in addition to the signed consent form, by interpreting the participant's demeanor, body language, and facial expressions to ensure that they were comfortable and willing to continue the current conversation. If it had been determined that a participant was no longer comfortable continuing in the study, or if the participant

stated this outright, the conversation would have been stopped immediately, and the participant would have been free to leave the study. All participants were willing throughout the interview and no one showed signs of being uncomfortable or indicated that they no longer wished to participate.

### **Data Collection**

The study took place at a public community college in southwest Florida which serves the five county area of Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties. In the 2015-16 academic year, the college had an enrollment of 21,271 with offerings of 20 associate degrees, 20 bachelor's degrees, and 16 certificate programs. The college was established in 1962, and in 2015-16 had a demographic breakdown of 50.5% White, 28.5% Hispanic/Latino, 11.1% African-American, and 4.4% other. In 2015-16, 61.1% of the students were female while 38.9% were male. The researcher conducted 17 recorded in-person interviews. 16 interviews took place in a private office located in the library, while one interview took place in an unused classroom located on a satellite location of the main campus. No one was present or able to hear the interview other than the researcher and the participant. In keeping with confidentiality, names were not used in the interview and interviews were coded with numbers 1-17. Prior to any analysis, interview data and observations were entered into a spread sheet, which is password protected.

Interviews were fairly unstructured and began with an initial question of: What degree or certificate program are you working on currently at the college? Probing questions followed, such as:

- Can you describe to me the factors which influenced you to enroll in college?
- In your own words, please describe what you feel you will gain from completing your college degree/certificate.
- How would you describe your personal societal views on family breadwinners?
- How would you describe your relationship, if any, with your father?
- How would you describe your family's income growing up?
- Did you experience any conflicting feelings in your decisions to attend college?

Appendix C contains sample interview questions.

Some individual interviews led to other varied questions depending on answers from the listed questions in order to gather as much data as possible from the participant. Data was transcribed by a transcription specialist. In order for data to be as valid as possible, grammar mistakes along with any dialect-specific verbiage were included in the transcriptions.

### **Data Analysis**

Charmaz (2014) described the analysis of grounded theory data in two phases, which the researcher followed for the analysis of data in the current study: initial coding and focused coding. In the first phase, known as initial coding, the researcher studies “fragments of data – words, lines, segments, and incidents – closely for their analytic import” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 68). While analyzing the data during initial coding, the following questions posed by Charmaz were asked to guide the analysis:

- What is this data a study of?

- What does the data suggest? Pronounce? Leave unsaid?
- From whose point of view? (p. 116)

The second phase described by Charmaz is focused coding. Focused coding is comprised of using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through and analyze large amounts of data. Memo writing occurs through the entire process and helps to informally track and chart the important records and data findings thus far in the research process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 164).

For this specific research and coding, the researcher studied the answers and open-ended conversations during the interview process to analyze reasons behind the timing of, or delay in, the community college enrollment of males. The researcher attempted to decipher whether gender perspectives, which would be made evident by the participants' responses, played a role in making the decision and whether the students felt pressure to make decisions based on how they felt society portrayed them.

### **Ethics**

My interest in this subject stems from being both a male who has completed both an undergraduate and graduate degree and one who works in admissions and enrollment management in higher education. I have witnessed the growing gap of male to female college enrollment for over 10 years and have questioned why males in today's society are not on the same pathway as their female counterparts. It was my hope that the data and subsequent findings will help to inform future researchers on the causes of the gender gap in college.

The study was carried out in an ethical manner. Participation was strictly on a volunteer basis, and all personal identifying items such as last name and address were not



collected. I do acknowledge, however, the fact that males may feel singled out with the interview request and included the disclaimer that the findings, while of course confidential, will be used to help foster further male development and success in higher education. Participants were not compensated in any manner. My specific professional role at the college is Dean of Students. I do not act in a supervisory role or provide grades to any student participating in the interviews. It was hoped that conducting the interviews in the college setting, in an academic environment, would result in willing participants who wish to help further scholarly research. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews. As a higher education administrator, I will use any data findings only in a generic manner when it comes to my career and professional role. The interview methods and interactions with participants were in compliance with IRB requirements. The informed consent form specifically stated that the interview was voluntary, that participants could terminate the interview at any time, and that termination did not affect their standing at the college or incur any penalties.

### **Expected Contributions of the Research**

The results of my research will add specific data and findings to the existing literature regarding the gender gap in college. Studies have been conducted that present research on the topic including Edwards and Jones, 2009, Harper and Harris, 2010, and Martinez Dolan, et al., 2015; however, nothing that I have found to date specifically draws on the idea that a gap in college enrollment exists due to deep personal factors resulting from societal outlooks and the perceptions males have on higher education and themselves. It was found that men are facing issues of gender stereotyping when making major life decisions, including attending college. In many instances men do not even

realize that this stereotyping is occurring. As a qualitative researcher, I found that the foundation of the study shifted as a direct result of the data collected and analyzed from the participants.

This dissertation was completed as part of the Department of Conflict Resolution Studies (DCRS). Throughout my time in the program and department, it has become very clear that this type of study falls within the parameters of this academic area. Specifically, this study contributes to the area of conflict analysis and resolution by attempting to describe the impact of the outlook of today's society on male community college enrollment. The area of gender and conflict is one of many subject matters in the discipline and supports the ever-evolving topic of gender identification and gender roles. The hope is that this study will become a scholarly contribution to the gender and conflict curriculum and perhaps be used as part of the curriculum in the NSU DCRS program. The results should help inform future students to the many potential life-altering, and possibly conflict-inducing, decisions that young males make when balancing their societal role and attending community college. Conflict resolution studies have become a discipline on their own. While I professionally work in higher education, I academically identify with the conflict resolution studies area. One of the courses I studied that made an impact was Gender and Conflict. Shortly after taking this course, I decided that my dissertation would be centered on this subject. While both genders have much conflict in today's world, the area of males and higher education is important to me as a researcher, male college administrator, and father to a son and daughter. It is my hope that in some manner, this research not only will contribute to both DCRS studies but to Student Affairs in higher education as well.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Overview

The main goal of this study was to gain knowledge of the reasons behind males' enrollment in public community college in southwest Florida and to analyze what role, if any, conflict played in their decision-making. Those who participated shared their backgrounds with the researcher through the interview process to better understand the experience they went through during the decision-making process to attend college. The process of analysis was as follows:

1. Reviewed the audio recording of each participant,
2. Studied each interview transcript to become engrossed in the material,
3. Manually recorded significant statements and flag for further analysis,
4. Identified initial codes,
5. Identified focused codes, and
6. Further analyzed and connected the focused codes to draw conclusions and recommendations per the study's central main focus, and creation of a theoretical code and grounded theory.

The analysis of the data identified three main focused codes: family influences, economic influences, and social influences. This chapter reviews a summary of the participants, a synopsis of the participants' experiences in regards to each focused code, and a synopsis of the research findings, solely driven by the results of the data gathered from the participants.

## **Participants**

In order to take part in the study, participants must have been enrolled in the SLS 1515 course entitled “Cornerstone Experience” during the Spring semester of 2016. This course is required of all first time in college students who have enrolled in the host college. A recruitment flyer (Appendix D) was emailed to all students enrolled in this course during the stated semester. The flyer stated that part of the preferred qualification for the study was that the students were male, or male-identifying. Emails were sent to approximately 400 students. Of those, 35 expressed initial interest in participating in the study; 17 of the 35 interested participants completed an interview with the researcher.

Participants completed an audio recorded interview with the researcher. During the interview some voluntary demographic information was collected to include, race, year of high school graduation or GED completion, and year of birth. All the participants were located in Florida and all interviews were conducted during the Spring semester of 2016.

## **Data Analysis**

Test interviews were completed with two volunteers prior to the start of actual participant interviews to ensure that the data collected would meet the goals of the study and to assist with validity. Recorded, in-person interviews, which lasted approximately 20-50 minutes, were conducted while notes were taken. Notes were abbreviated so as not to lose focus on the participant as main data gathering was being captured by the audio recording. Participants were reminded of the goal of confidentiality for the study and were invited to read the final product after this dissertation was concluded. Interview data were stored securely on a password protected flash drive as well as on password protected computer hard drive. Upon conclusion of the dissertation, interview data will be stored only on the

password protected flash drive and locked in a file cabinet only accessible by the researcher.

Data was captured using Microsoft Excel.

### Demographics

A Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet was used to record participants' demographic information, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Demographics of Participants*

Participant	Race	Year of HS Graduation or GED Completion	Year of Birth	Future Academic Plans
1	Black/African-American	1999 (HS)	1981	Networking
2	White	1981 (GED)	1963	Physical Therapy Assistant
3	White	2014 (HS)	1998	General Studies
4	Hispanic	2009 (HS)	1991	Medical
5	White	2012 (GED)	1994	Psychology
6	Black/African-American	1990 (GED)	1965	Accounting
7	White	1981 (HS)	1964	Medical
8	Hispanic	1998 (GED)	1978	Criminal Justice
9	White	2014 (HS)	1996	Accounting
10	White	2015 (HS)	1997	General Business
11	Hispanic	2015 (HS)	1997	Medical
12	Black/African-American	2015 (HS)	1997	Medical
13	Hispanic	2013 (GED)	1992	Psychology
14	Asian	2005 (HS)	1988	General Business
15	Asian	2014 (GED)	1996	Music
16	White	2011 (HS)	1993	Architecture
17	Black/African American	1989 (GED)	1959	Law

*Note.* Participant number corresponds to the order in which the participant was interviewed. Race of each participant as defined by the U.S. Department of Education.

Demographic data also was organized into two additional tables. Table 3 breaks down the 17 respondents between traditional age students and non-traditional age

students. Traditional age was defined as those 23 or younger, while non-traditional age was 24 or older. Eight respondents, or 47% of students, were traditional age, while 9, or 53% were of non-traditional age.

Table 3

*Breakdown of Participants: Traditional Age versus Non-Traditional Age*

Age Group	<i>N</i>
Traditional Age: 23 or younger	8
Non-traditional Age: 24 or older	9
Total	17

Table 4 shows the response rate by race, as defined by the US Department of Education.

Table 4

*Race of Participants*

Race	<i>N</i>
Asian	2
Black/African American	4
Hispanic	4
White	7
Total	17

### **Memo-Writing**

At this time in the process the researcher utilized the important grounded theory step of memo-writing. “Memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers. When you write memos, you stop and analyze your ideas about the codes in any- and every way that occurs to you during the moment” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). As the researcher combed through the interview, data notes were drafted on themes and threads of common data. Charmaz (2014) says that memos

should be crafted in a spontaneous and non-mechanical way, which is how the memo notes for this study were completed. Charmaz (2014) also states that memos should be created in a way that is personal to the researcher and used for personal methods rather than for public use. In this study, the memoing process consisted of a journal crafted in an unstructured manner listing notes and thoughts from each interview and then deciphered to find the 53 initial codes of the data findings. Appendix E lists the initial codes of the study.

### **Data Coding: Initial Codes**

The researcher reviewed the transcriptions at various times while memoing in order to understand the content and material. Charmaz (2014) stated, “Try to see actions in each segment of data rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data. Attempt to code with words that reflect action” (p. 116). Using Charmaz’s methods, transcripts were read and studied and general concepts were first identified and coded as initial codes. As a result, 53 initial codes were identified. A sample of frequent initial codes included: Just knew I needed to go to college; Not acceptable in society to just be sitting around; and Do not want to waste VA benefits. Appendix E contains the entire list of initial codes. As part of the memoing process, the researcher created a cluster chart which assisted in identifying the three focused codes derived from the 53 initial codes. Using constant comparison with the existing data the 53 initial codes were grouped in to the three focused codes. The three focused codes were family influence (F), economic influence (E), and societal influence (S).

### **Data Coding: Focused Codes**

The first focused code showed the influence that family had on participants' decision to enroll in college. This was comprised of factors such as siblings going to college, pressure from parents, and wanting to be a positive influence for their own children. The second focused code showed the influence that economic factors had on participants' decision to enroll in college. This code was comprised of factors such as the need to feel middle class, having a well-paying physical job out of high school that was not maintainable later in life, and college not being an option right out of high school due to cost. The third focused code showed the influence that societal factors had on participants' decisions to enroll in college. This code was comprised of factors such as not wanting to just play video games, faulting the high school for lack of college preparation, and joining the military to follow some peers. Concentration then was put on these codes in relation to the research questions of the study to see if they would provide further research and understanding to the problem. As with a qualitative study, the codes that were formed were the result of interviews, which were structured to lead the researcher to new and independent views, solely driven by the research process. In order to address the research questions, it must be understood how these factors, described as codes, affected the decisions of the participants. The findings section describes the three focused codes: family influence, economic factors, and societal factors. In the conclusion section, the researcher presents the theoretical model created by the three coded factors.

### **Theoretical Coding**

“Theoretical coding is a sophisticated level of coding that follows the codes you have selected during focused coding” (Charmaz, 2014, p.150). At this time of the



analysis, the focused codes were analyzed using a theoretical model to build the ultimate grounded theory of the study. The process was found to be ambiguous while working through the entire process, and this is backed up by Charmaz (2014) when stated that “...the extent to which theoretical coding is an application or emergent process is somewhat ambiguous (p. 150). The main theoretical code and grounded theory is found later in the chapter.

## **Findings**

### **Family Influences**

Using the constant comparison method of data analysis, family was identified as the first focused code derived from the 53 initial codes identified in the study. By comparing the codes associated with family influence, it was determined that the current literature was very limited on these specific coded findings. The literature specifically reviewed for this study did not indicate the family influences such as being a role model for a younger sibling/ family member or following a sibling along in college as a factor in influencing the college decision process.

Through the use of memos, the three emerging codes supporting the Family focused code were discovered. While sorting through the raw interview data, and beginning to create memos, the researcher asked the memoing questions of “what are people doing, what are they saying or trying to say, and what comparisons can you make?” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 169). It was clear when making the early memos that family was an influence to some degree for all participants and at this time I was able to begin to begin to categorize the data to create advanced memos. It was at this time that the memo process allowed the emergence of the three family codes: family member went to college,

family pressures to go to college, and acting as a role model for a younger sibling. The advanced memoing step allowed me to realize the complicated nature of the family influence as young men may struggle to make their own decisions about their futures but are constrained by family structures. Family structures are very important but can be either a positive or negative influence depending on the specific consequences.

All participants felt that family, in some capacity, was an influence on their decision to enroll in college. Nine participants stated that they started college simply because their parents went to college. They felt that family was a driving factor in this important life decision. Factors such as monetary gain, personal enrichment, and becoming a positive influence were stated by all 17 participants in some capacity. Eight of the participants stated that discussing their college goals helped them to become closer and more trusting of the relatives who they discussed their plans with.

Participant 4 stated:

My family has always been close-knit because we are Hispanic. My parents did not go to college but they own their own businesses and work very hard to be successful. We are not millionaires but do well enough to live an upper-middle class life. My parents did not force me to go to college, however they strongly encouraged it. They did not want me to struggle initially as they did, just to pay basic bills. If college did not result in a well-paying job at least I would learn additional skills to open a business as they have.

Participant 4 also discussed what it means to go to college:

It is a dream and a feat that almost seems impossible to some of my family, friends, and community. The older generations have almost no college graduates

and they take much pride in seeing my generation go to college and set themselves on a path to success. There was never a real question as to if I would go to college, the questions would be how it was going to be paid for and how would I balance classes, work, family obligations, etc....

Participant 15 made a similar statement: “In my household, college was never not an option. However, it in many ways left up to me to figure out how to get there, enroll, pay for it, and ultimately be successful.”

Participant 11 agreed:

There was an unspoken understanding that college was my next step. We never really spoke about it but we all knew it had to happen. My dad went to college but mom did not. He never really gave me any advice or tips because he is busy with his career. Fortunately the academic advisors here at the college can help me.

Participant 9 made a statement that aligns with the study’s central focus:

It was hard during high school to try and get good grades but at the same time attempt to ‘fit in’ with the crowd. It wasn’t cool to be seen as smart and to try in school, my friends were like slackers and I would get picked on for studying to getting good grades. At the same time my family had expectations that I would be a good student both in high school and eventually in college and then go on to a successful career after college. I feel like society had an effect on my friends, things like movies and social media posts glorifying being a slacker, violence, or just in general not following a mainstream approach to life. It caused so much conflict for me internally it was hard to keep my thoughts straight.

The beginning of an emerging theoretical code begins to show itself with these quotes. The men, in their comments, are showing that even family influences are based on gender stereotypes of what they should be or how they should act. This is not outwardly a negative influence but one which starts to show repetition in the study.

All 17 participants, in one manner or another, echoed the previous statement in their interview, such as “Do I follow society or do I follow my family?”, and “My heart said do what is right while my head said follow the trend.” The items such as peer conflict, family influence, and the need to be successful in life dominated the decisions on how, when, and should they enroll in college. In keeping with the family theme, Table 5 shows the three initial codes which corresponded with this these.

Table 5

*Codes Relating to Family Influences*

---

<b>Family Influence</b>
Family member(s) went to college
Family pressures to go to college
Acts as a role model for children or younger siblings

---

**Family member(s) went to college.** 13 of the participants indicated that they had family members who went to college, some completing and other just starting and stopping prior to completing a degree. Nonetheless, being influenced by a family member attending college was a significant factor in the decision to enroll. In some examples, the family member who attended college was a positive influence and, in some cases, a negative influence.

Participant 7 confirmed this influence:

My father attended college and we went on to become a doctor. But some backstory- he was like a rag to riches story, grew up poor, and by his bootstraps he put himself through college including medical school. He also served as a physician in the Vietnam War. He came home a hero due to his position served, even as many other soldiers were looked down upon when they returned. He became a larger than life figure to me and my brother. After getting old enough to understand his path in life, we were intimidated with the idea that we had to do the same. My path took me another route and now I am in my fifties trying to catch up.

Participant 3 had a different experience but still one that is parallel to the experience of the family member in college:

My older sister went to college, however she did not do to well. Neither of my parents went to college so this was a new thing for them in all aspects. When my sister failed out, I think my parents were somewhat embarrassed and it may have reiterated to them that college just isn't for 'us.' I took a four year break before deciding to go to college. My parents were still somewhat skeptical but by that time I was working and living on my own in an apartment with a roommate so it was all my decision. I was also tired of living with a roommate and having to rent. I wanted my own family, own house, and a way to support those things. I saw being successful in college as the path to that experience.

Participants 7 and 3, respectively, are also showing that gender stereotypes played a role in their development and decision-making on college and what expectations were held for them. Family history, as well, as family expectations are crafting

self-expectations for these men. Gender stereotyping has played the part of influencer in the decision-making process.

Participant 5 had a mix of both of the previous quotes:

My parents both attempted college in the 1970's but it didn't work out for either of them. They both ended up in jobs as skilled laborers and worked very hard and are still working very hard, but I know they both wish they had completed college and maybe entered in to more of a white-collar career path. Meanwhile, my older brother went on to graduate school and finished an accounting degree. He has become very successful, especially financially, and I think that has sort of redeemed my parents' experience. His experience has influenced me to start college. However, I took one year off, a gap year as they call it. This was due to my parent's situation, I wanted to be sure I was ready. But my brother's success pushed me to actually begin.

Many of the participants showed signs of disengagement when they started the planning process of college enrollment. A number decided early that college was not for them, however, some of that disengagement was because of a family or social influence telling them, at that time, college is not for you, or it is not needed. Additionally, some participants decided, on their own, that working in a job which paid a decent wage for a recent high school graduate was a good plan at the time, only to find out that they were being shortsighted and not seeing the future ahead of them.

Participant 5 went on to support this further:

My successful brother had moved away since college so I had to overcome a feeling of disconnect from a successfully educated family member. My self-

confidence and belief that I could graduate from college and be successfully employed had taken a hit and my high school counselors did not help very much. Once I actually stepped foot in college and saw that other people were in my same boat I felt much better.

Participant 5 shows self-doubt was part of his discovery process for college. He also was highly influenced by the departure of his brother both in a positive and negative way. As a positive, his brother's success planted a seed of ambition for him, on the other hand his brother's success led him to move away which had a negative impact.

**Family pressures to attend college.** Family pressures to attend college also were part of the family influence focused code. This influence was different from the family member attended college influence in that family members played a part in the participants' decision to enroll in college, although it did not necessarily mean that the family members themselves went to college. Nine of the participants indicated that this played a part in their college decision making.

Participant 12 stated:

My mom did not go to college and she raised me, my father was absent from my life. My mom worked long hard hours at cleaning jobs and washing clothes, it was her dream for me to go to college and make something more of my life than she felt that she did. I always try to remind her that just because she did not go to college that she raised me and that we never ran out of food, even though times were certainly tough at times. But with most people, she judged her achievements by how much money she made and how glorious, or not glorious, her

employment level was. I was not ready to go to college just yet right after high school, I wanted to take some time off to explore and figure out what I wanted to do. However, my mother felt different, she essentially made me go to college right away as she felt that time off would be a detriment. I was angry at first, and I am still not sure it was the best decision but I have accepted it, because if nothing else it made her happy and she feels that I am 'on my way.'

Participant 6 had a different experience, but still had some conflicted feelings about his college enrollment:

I am a non-traditional aged student and completed my GED later in life. My parents did not go to college and our entire family was never serious about school, even high school. As I reached middle-age, and my parents were now elderly, I sensed they still had a hope for me to attend college. I barely got my GED and it enabled me to work as a mechanic, however I sensed the hope from my parents. I decided to enroll and pursue a general associates degree so that my parents could see at least one of their children go to college. Sadly, my father passed away last month and will not see me graduate, however he knew that I started. I hope that my mother lives long enough to see me finish.

Participants 12 and 6 display strong family pressures to attend college. The data here shows that men were pressured, or made to feel obligated to attend college by family. Gender stereotypes in this case emerge as a point of confliction for the participant. They want to meet their family's expectations but had other reasons which may have steered them away from going to college.



Keen (1991) stated that “There is a virtue (empathy) that marks the lives of those who have returned from the journey into depths of the self” (p. 156). This is an example that the decision to enroll in college can go beyond simply the need to get a job or even simply to get educated. Some students are doing it as a life goal, and a goal that is more focused on the needs of others than of the students themselves.

Participant 2 experienced family influence from a different level and perspective:

I was raised in an extended family structure living with aunts, uncles, and cousins. I graduated high school on time, barely, and personally had no real plans on what to do afterwards. After visiting the college I realized that because of our low income I could get a grant to go to school and even get some money as a refund because of the low tuition rate of the public community college. My uncle really wanted me to join the military, I think for his own pride, but when he realized I could help some with the bills from my refund money he was all of a sudden on board about me being in college. Not the best reason for his support but I guess it was better than no support at all.

Participant 2 shows an example of possibly being taken advantage of by a family member because of his college enrollment. At first, it was expected of him as a male in his family to join the military. However, when his uncle realized that going to college could actually mean money in the family’s pocket due to financial aid, things changed.

**Act as a role model for children or younger siblings.** While the previous two family influence sections relate to another family member acting as the agent to influence enrollment in college, this next area can be viewed upon as the reverse. A

number of the participants indicated that a main reason they enrolled in college was to act as a positive influence either for their own children or for younger siblings. This shows that the participants influenced themselves to be good examples for a younger generation, which is obverse from the previous family influence descriptions.

Participant 1 described the influence for which he felt responsible:

I am a bit of a non-traditional student when it comes to college being in my mid-30's when I first enrolled. However, I now have a three year old daughter who I feel greatly responsible for in terms of being a positive influence. I had never seriously considered college before because I was getting by on working a few part-time jobs at a time. I was doing things like running pizzas, bartending, and serving. However, after my daughter was born, I took some time to reflect on how I would look to her when she was old enough to realize what I do workwise.

Participant 8 had a similar experience but in a different way:

I am the oldest sibling of a very mixed family and one where I have many half-siblings and step-siblings. I dropped out of high school at 16, and while in 11th grade. I did not set a very good example as the oldest. I got into trouble and had some drug related offenses, as well as some traffic. The adults did not go to college and everyone worked menial jobs, if at all. I realized at 25 that I had an obligation to the younger generation to be a good influence, even though I personally did not have any real good influences in my life. I mean, some of them tried, but they just were not making it. I decided to get my GED and show my younger relatives what someone in our positions could achieve, even with the deck stacked against us. Someone had to rise up and show that it could be done, I

decided that someone was me. I just hope now that I can actually finish my degree and show how it can be done.

Participants 1 and 8 strive to portray positive gender stereotypes for close family members such as children and siblings. These are steps taken to show that not only they can lead a positive life but those family members, who are influential enough to cause a change in life direction, can also be a success, at least in education.

Participant 10 also described a similar scenario:

My younger brother is just two years behind me and was already getting in trouble in middle-school and even more so in high school. Many years we were in the same school together so his behavior could affect me as well, even though I tried to stay clean and on the up and up. When it came time for me to graduate, and he was in tenth grade, many of my friends were slacking off, and after graduation got even deeper in to drugs and worked part-time jobs. While I did take a year off after high school, I obtained a full-time job for that year working at a large hardware store and actually started saving some money. This year, I now enrolled here at the college and it coincides with my brother starting his senior year of high school. I just hope that he stays the course and follows my lead, I know that my parents hope the same. I am keeping my fingers crossed and also hope that I get good grades during my first semester at college so that he sees my accomplishments and that they are for real.

Emergent gender stereotypes for participant 10 show the continued pattern of a male student striving to provide a positive influence for a younger sibling who is

thought to be potentially at risk for his future. The participant here assumes that this younger brother may not make it through school without his guidance. There is no way to tell if that will be true, however, it fits the pattern of doubts for the stereotypical high school male.

### **Economic Factors**

Using constant comparison with the data the second focused code was identified as economic factors. In the literature review Tanner and Cockerill (1996) referred to the smaller numbers of younger males enrolling in pharmacy school and larger numbers of younger females filling the gaps of retiring pharmacists, of which a majority are men. The issue with this piece of literature is the non-explanation of the reasons why this is occurring. While analyzing the 53 initial codes of the data, it was determined that the three focused codes below best identified economic factors influencing males' decisions on college enrollment.

The early memo process allowed the researcher to discover that the participants were viewing economic factors as a major component in the decision to go to college. The participants were stating different variations of what they felt college meant for their futures as well as how it could support them in the shorter term. The researcher noticed as part of the memos that none of the participants mentioned how to pay for college when discussing economic factors in college enrollment. This was noted as the memo process proceeded and determined that it was in the best interest of this study to not push the topic as college-cost is an important and emotional topic at this time. This is a topic which the researcher hopes will be taken up in a future study. As the transition to advanced memos began for economic factors, the research process unveiled that many of

the participants viewed college as not only needed to provide basic needs but also as a necessity to keep up their view of a successful life style.

Table 6 illustrates the three codes relating to the economic factors identified by the participants.

Table 6

*Codes Relating to Economic Factors*

---

<b>Economic Factors</b>
The need to keep up
Provide basic needs
Military benefits

---

**The need to keep up.** About half of the participants discussed “the need to keep up” when describing their reasons for enrolling in college when they did. As society continues to portray mixed signals on higher education, with part of society continuing to push for everyone to go to college, while another part questions the value in comparison to the net result, it is not surprising that those who have not attended college yet feel that doing so is required to just keep up.

Participant 12 offered the following:

One of the things that I considered while thinking about college was where would I be without it? My family was solid middle-class, like right down the line. We had enough money to have a home and cars that were not falling apart. But it was nothing fancy, no mansions, no second homes, no sports cars. We took the occasional vacation but no tours across Europe or anything. My father went to college and mom went for a little while. This shaped my view that in order to at least ‘keep my head above water’ that I needed college and needed to start right

away. Otherwise what would I amount to? If my parents went to college and just made it to middle class, how hard would I need to work if I just wanted to survive comfortably? I would imagine how hard it would be to live upper class if it was this hard to just stay middle class and comfortable?

Participant 12 struggles with the stereotypes of becoming middle and upper class and what it takes to just reach the lower limits of these goals. Anything higher appears to be just a dream and already out of reach.

Participant 1 had similar thoughts:

If I don't have any natural talents that can earn an income for myself it feels as if college is the way that I have to go in today's world. I don't want to fall behind the status quo, I want to be successful and lead an enriching and impactful life, and I also want to make enough so that I can enjoy life as well and hopefully be able to retire at some point as well. So yes, I feel the need to keep up the pace and join the ranks of the college-educated employed of the world.

Participant 13 added a perspective from a somewhat different point of view:

I needed to keep up with my job. I was fortunate enough to be given a good opportunity out of high school to work as a bank teller. However, as I saw some of my colleagues move on to promotions and better opportunities, I knew I had to change something to keep up. So, no, I did not enroll in college just after high school because I was paying the bills and doing ok for a single guy. But seeing others move on and I felt stuck was not a good feeling. So I made the decision that I needed to get enrolled in school. At the very least I needed to get in and start on a general degree to put on my resume, which I did. So I guess you could

say that I was trying to keep up with things, both personally and financially. Once I could show that I was even just enrolled in courses I was looked upon for new opportunities and advancements. We will see how it all shakes out once I actually complete my associate's degree and what real opportunities come my way at that point. So far, however, it seems like a very good start. I am not sure if I would have been promoted to start college if I had not seen others getting opportunities that I was not, so yes, I was very much trying to keep up and not fall behind.

Participants 1 and 13 shows signs of self-pressure to meet the stereotype of what is needed to be a "success." In this regard it is a college degree.

**Provide basic needs.** Seventy-five percent of the participants indicated in one manner or another that they viewed going to college as a way to provide basic needs, with basic needs based on the idea that a college education is needed simply to pay the bills as it relates to everyday living and not necessarily for items that some individuals would consider extras (vacations, new car, entertainment). This can continue to pose the question of whether society has positioned a college education as needed simply to "survive." Participant 7 added the following:

I was working what I describe as 'summer jobs' after high school. They may have been fun and partly social as people I also went to high school with were also working these jobs. However, I realized that I was spending what I was making on socializing and that it wasn't enough to ever move out of my mother's house. I realized that I needed more to simply be able to survive on my own. I know that starting with my basic college education was the way that I needed to begin that journey.

Participant 15 added a bit of a different but related perspective:

I had a decent job in construction when I completed my GED. I was making what was probably a higher than average salary for someone my age and had enough money to purchase a car, have my own house to rent, and did not feel burdened by being in any financial binds. My uncle also worked the same type of jobs that I was working. However when he was about 56 he had a very bad back injury while participating in a recreational activity, not work related. At that point he could no longer work in the construction job any longer. He had no type of disability insurance or much of a savings so he fell on some real hard times, especially financially. He also became very depressed because of the entire situation. Here was a guy who worked for close to 40 years in his profession and just like that he was no longer able to do his job any longer. He did not go to college so even with his years of experience he was not able to move in to a supervisory role or more of a white collar role with the same company. He was stuck in a lot of ways and at this age he was dead set against not going back to school to get a college degree. It was that experience which made me realize at my age that I still had a good long time that I could get my college degree and still work in construction at the same time if I wanted. However, I would have that backup that in the event that I could not work in the physical setting any longer that I would have the college degree to hopefully fall back on if I needed it. In the meantime if I decided that I no longer wanted to work in construction I could also look for a new job in a different field. I did look at this as a way to just 'keep up' because if later in life, or even in the short term, I could no longer function in this type of job I would be



in a very bad position and would no longer be able to keep my same standard of living. This education I guess you could almost describe as a type of insurance policy for me in order to maintain my daily routine and employment options.

Participants 7 and 15 view college as a method of insurance. To them it provides a fall back in the event that they can no longer perform in a physical job setting, but would be able to keep a similar standard of living.

Participant 8 offered this insight:

In our current society it seems as if it is college or nothing, just to make it in this country. There are presidential candidates talking about free college for all, and even the current president had made an attempt to provide free community college to all. If that is not a vote for the idea that college is mandatory for everyone to be successful I am not sure what is. I think that might be an unintended consequence of what they are trying to provide to the nation. There are other ways to make a living without college, but you will probably have to be creative and motivated. I think its ok to not go to college, however, when leaders are pushing the idea so hard it is hard to see past that as a mandatory step to success and to just 'survive.'

Participant 8 references current topics in both media and politics which he views as pushing a college education as almost a mandatory step in one's life. While the debates continue on the value of higher education, the culture still supports the idea that a college degree is seen as mandatory to one's financial success.

**Military benefits.** One trend in conversation during the interviews was the discussion of the use of military benefits. Four of the participants mentioned military benefits as a major factor in attending college; thus it was viewed by the researcher as a

valid topic for the data analysis. The post-9/11 GI benefits have become a significant benefit to the nation's veterans who are seeking to attend college. Participant 4 discussed his opportunity to attend college using his benefits:

After leaving the Marines I had this wonderful opportunity to use my VA benefits to attend college. I joined the military right after high school and college was the last thing that was on my mind at that point in my life. I wanted to challenge myself to go on to bigger things in life, and the Marines were it. I was very fortunate, but also had to work extremely hard to be a Marine, but I knew it was the best thing for me. I cannot imagine not having that opportunity as part of my life. As I grew closer to the end of my time with them, I started thinking about what was next. I realized the generous benefits that the government offers us to go to college and I had to jump at the chance. Not only is it providing my formal education it is helping to pay my living expenses as well. I hate to see some of my fellow vets not taking advantage of this opportunity. They don't realize what they are missing out on and how much it could cost them in the future if they don't take advantage of it. The military taught me most of the life skills that I think I need, however coming back to the civilian world and needing a job eventually pretty much forces you to have a college education, at least if you want to have a decent job not breaking your back for more than your normal retirement age.

Participant 16 had similar thoughts, but added a different perspective as well:

The military gives veterans a huge benefit to attend college so much as to where it pays some of your living expenses as well as your tuition. So it's a great deal that almost cannot be passed up. However, in my first semester here at the college I

have encountered some issues that I have to try and resolve. Here I am, someone who was injured in the line of duty in the Middle-East and I am sitting here with a bunch of kids, and professors, I am sorry to say, who have next to no real world experience. They do not have even the smallest bit of understanding what it is like to be in combat and be putting your life on the line every day in front of people who want to wipe you out as fast as possible. I have to adjust to this new lifestyle. I respect the professors and their roles but I can't help but sit there at times and wonder if they have any clue as to what I have seen and experienced in combat. I have been able to be respectful and will continue to try hard to do so. The other students are another thing. Here I am with these kids who think they are 'thugs' trying to be badass. Let me tell you what badass is- it is coming under fire by terrorists in a foreign land where the only people you can count on are your comrades. And if you get left behind, by accident, you cannot even imagine the torture you will be facing. It is not even comparable to domestic life. I am trying to adjust well and am seeing counseling to help me, it is a tough transition, but one that I am thankful to have.

Participants 4 and 16 stress the value of using their military benefits for college. This is a decision-making influencer that is unique to just a portion of men who attend college. This is a very important benefit which these men have a right to take advantage of whether their reasoning is to improve employment prospects or just to use an earned benefit.

### **Social Factors**

The third focused code from the data, derived from the 53 initial codes, are social factors. Using constant comparison with the existing data, the three social influence factors compared with Evergreen (2013) as well as Harper and Harris (2010) show us that existing literature is addressing social factors as it relates to men's college enrollment choices. However, more is needed to specifically address ways to bridge the gaps as it relates to helping men understand possible social barriers to college enrollment and what to actually do about it. Chapter five addresses some recommendations for this gap.

The early memo process was challenging as almost all 53 initial codes could have been classified under the social factor banner to some degree. However, it became evident through the memos that a few influencers truly belonged under the social factor focused code. Notes were taken in the memos that specifically mentioned how the participants seemed worn down or almost beat down when speaking about society. It was noted that no matter how much they believed they may have their lives and place in society figured out that it seemed as if it could be pulled out from under them at any moment and they would be forced to change their entire perspective on their place in life. As the researcher transitioned to advanced memoing for social factors, it became evident that roles in society and perceptions of these roles were significant to the findings. Even while comparing participants who varied greatly by age, situations, or experiences, society has made a huge impact, whether positive or negative.

Table 7 illustrates the codes identified by the participants relating to social factors.

Table 7

*Codes Relating to Social Factors***Social Factors**

Male perspective of “bumming it”

Perspective of needing to be a provider

Influence of high school years

**Male perspective of “bumming it.”** The “bumming it” perspective pulls in a wide variety of insights from the participants. According to the participants, their definition of “bumming it” stemmed from the high school outlook that staying around the house, possibly playing video games, and otherwise just relaxing with no real sense of purpose or drive was almost looked upon as the popular thing to do or expected that some males would do it, as opposed to working or going to college. Some participants were allowed to play this role while others were not permitted to by their parents. While this could be a role that females play as well, the participants in the study felt it was strongly a male trait, one that they felt females would almost never take on. It was not unique to the younger participants either as non-traditional age participants mentioned this as well from the 1980’s or 1990’s, however their activities may have been different, i.e. hanging out in the street rather than playing video games. Although a somewhat casual title for a topic, the researcher felt like it encompassed a significant portion of interview responses and thus was worthy of being included with such a title. Participant 5 gave the following thoughts:

I didn’t want to be bumming it. I took a year off after higher school and felt like I was on the cusp of being a bum. To be honest, there were a few guys from my class who went on to college right away, some went to the military, and others

were in full-time type jobs like in construction, laying drywall, doing carpeting and other stuff like that. But I saw an entire other group, which I think was almost the majority of the guys, at least the ones that I knew and hung around with, who were not doing much of anything. I think everyone after high school graduation wants a break and it feels really good at first having no responsibility, not needing to get up early and all that. Of course, as long as your parents are letting you do that. I did it at first, and it was great, that summer was fun and awesome. Then the fall came along and others, younger than me, were going back to school and all of a sudden it was feeling like the carefree summer was coming to an end, which it was, and guess what? I had no plans. I quickly started to feel like in a panic like uh oh, I am being left behind. But the thing is that it didn't seem like many of the girls from my graduating class were going through the same thing, they had plans for that fall. I still didn't get myself in order enough to start classes that next January but when the summer semester started there I was signing up for classes.

Participant 5 strongly feels that he is affected by gender stereotyping. He realized he was falling into a similar path, and decided to make a change. In his case, he was concerned that society would view him as not achieving the goals that he should as compared to his peers.

Participant 14 offered the following thoughts:

I felt like there was this sense that males were just supposed to 'make it through high school.' And if you were lucky enough to do so, you could at least go on to a job that wasn't in fast food. You may never be at a management or leadership level but at least you could work. What kind of standards does that set for us? It

seems like this is becoming a trend for males these days, almost like you are now an exception by “making it.” Kind of like we are being left behind without much afterthought. I sometimes wonder if males, at least white males have been successful for so long in society, maybe sometimes unfairly, that when we start to fall behind that no one cares. Almost like they had their times now it’s time for others to be successful. And while I certainly think that everyone should be successful, no matter what gender or race, how is it fair if my demographic gets left behind, is that not an issue as well?

Participant 6 provided a different perspective in terms of his background:

I grew up in an inner-city, where as a black male the goal was to just survive, especially in the 1970’s. Graduating from high school was not even really an option, the goal was to stay out of jail. I left school at 16 and moved across town with my uncle as my father was not around and my mom was already struggling. I started working as a low level mechanic with some basic training that my uncle gave me. I made some money but I really had no chance at that point in time to advance or move out of the hood. I somehow stayed out of jail even with running with some gangs and getting in to some drugs. I was a lucky one. I finally got a chance to move to a better place with some extended family. Back in the day as a teen and young adult I would have been bullied and taunted for pursuing school. I hope that times continue to change and that we never revert back to education being looked down upon. The worst part is that there are still those stuck in the same position I was at forty years ago. But you have to have the drive to get out of it, but you also need the help and good influences. That is hard to come by, it

can become a never-ending cycle. It's sad and I can try and be part of the solution and help to keep progress moving. Society has a way of getting in your head and telling you are nothing and will never be anything. It is vicious to be a part of that. Participants 14 and 6 describe gender stereotypes with a passion and detail which shows how much they affect young males' decision-making patterns.

Participant 1 offered this insight to his perspective of "bumming it":

Video-games! So many of my friends are obsessed that I think it has become a national dilemma. I mean it's like they are living in alternate reality. There is no reality in it, you are in your room doing nothing productive. Then they have this sense that somehow what happens in the games is real life. No, you have to get out and work and be successful. I think of this as a 'bumming' lifestyle. I don't think all video games are bad, but you need a break from them. I fear that it may be part of the problem as to why society is making some guys feel like they cannot make it or be successful. If we are sitting inside all day just playing games of course they think that. Of course, the video game people will continue to make and market games to pull us in and become addicted. It's almost like a drug. Maybe you can be ok with limits but let it get out of control and watch out. Yes, I think the video game obsessed generation is a problem, we are not helping ourselves out with them.

Participant 1 battles with the stereotype of a young male as a "bum" or "slacker," but understands that stereotypes are dangerous and not exclusive.

**Perspective of needing to be a provider.** Approximately 50% of the participants discussed the need to be a provider in their family as an influence to start college right



after high school. The factors behind this feeling were rooted in a few different societal outlooks as described by the participants. Participant 14 gave the following thoughts:

I enrolled in college right after high school because I want to have what some people would call a traditional family structure. I want to provide fully for my future wife and children on my own, and I don't want my wife to have to work, if she does not want to. I have no issues with her working but I want not working as an option. It may be old fashioned and out of date, however I don't want popular society to dictate how my family is run. If we still want a traditional dad work, and mom stays home setup, then I want that option. I see nothing wrong with that and I won't let society bully a decision like that because it is the new fad to not have traditional family structure like this.

Participant 8 had some similar, but also different, feelings:

No matter what, I want to make enough to provide for my family. I don't expect to be rich or own a mansion but I want to be a good influence on society and for my kids. Everything points to the fact that I need a college education. I am not good with my hands so I won't be a mechanic, carpenter, construction guy, you know some of the areas where you may make decent money but you need to have that skill set. I don't have it, so what is left? A college education is left and, I hope, will help me in to more of a white collar job that will provide a secure and financially sound living.

Participants 14 and 8 realize the need to be a provider. If classified as a stereotype this can be viewed in a positive light and one which takes responsibility for self and family.

**Influence of high school years.** The last societal factor that needed to be mentioned in the data findings was the influence of the high school years in college enrollment. This can be divided up roughly in two segments: positive college experience during high school and nonexistent college influence during high school. The positive experience was commented on by Participant 3:

College was put in front of us from the start at my high school. What I mean by that is we had college fairs all the time and college recruiters visiting our school. It was not even really presented as an option, some of our teachers would take us out of class to go to it, and some of the counselors would follow up with us to make sure that we attended. This was part of my decision, it was the thing to do, and you applied to college and made a plan. College was sold to us as very positive and something that needed to be done, at least for my class, there really wasn't an option. It wasn't a question of when you were going to college but where you were going to college.

Participant 17 had a different experience:

College was never talked about in my high school. We were more inner-city and our teachers just wanted to move us along and get us out of school. They didn't care about if we were going to college, and honestly, most of us didn't care either. School was not much use for us. We either dropped out, got a GED, or finished some type of alternative program a few years later at 20 or 21. College recruiters only showed up for the kids in the high level courses. This is why I enrolled in college later in life as now I see it as a personal goal and a way to better my current employment. But no, college exposure in high school was not a positive

experience for me. It was something that other kids did, and those kids were no part of the society which I lived in. It took until this point, closer to middle-age, to appreciate what this experience will bring me and the opportunities that come with it.

Participants 3 and 17 describe two different high school experiences, which were shaped by stereotypes by the types of high schools and areas in which they grew up. This issue perpetuates not just gender but larger societal stereotypes by society offering different services to what is perceived as two different demographics of people. When two demographics are treated differently, not only are gender stereotypes happening but the larger view of those individuals who are part of that demographic are being stereotyped as well. This further perpetuates societal disadvantages.

## **Conclusion**

Theoretic sampling was used when analyzing the aforementioned data and grouping that data in the three codes described previously. Charmaz (2014) stated, “Theoretical sampling in grounded theory provides a valuable tool for developing your analysis and correcting trouble spots. Grappling with analytic problems is part of the research process. Feeling confused and uncertain - but learning to tolerate the ambiguity - shows your growth as a researcher” (p. 212). The researcher needed to follow these exact thoughts as presented by Charmaz at the conclusion of the participant interviews and the start of the data analysis phase, since it seemed as if one of the core questions of the study involving the gap year between high school and college may not have been answered. Data were being found regarding reasoning for enrolling in college but not necessarily data for reasons not enrolling in college. When working through the process, the

researcher needed to tolerate the idea that the exact research questions may not be answered in the exact manner in which it was anticipated they might. However, from the start, as with any qualitative research project, the data guided the study and the conclusions. The participants provided a rich pool of information and data for the study and the researcher was eager to draw conclusions for recommendations from the data findings.

### **Saturation**

A central question to any study is: When do you stop collecting data and begin the process of analyzing findings and recommendations? Charmaz (2014) offered the following:

The standard short grounded theory answer to the criteria questions dictates: stop when the properties of your theoretical categories are ‘saturated’ with data. In other words, your categories are robust because you have found no new properties of these categories and your established properties account for patterns in your data. (p. 213)

Charmaz (2014) added “...a skilled interviewer who conducts 10 interviews may produce a more significant analysis than a novice who conducts 50” (p. 214). The researcher found that at the 17 interviews the responses and feedback were providing not just repetitive data, but a conceptual pattern that was categorized by the main three codes of the study. The reasoning for enrolling in college was forming these patterns among varied demographics among the participants all enrolled in a public community college in southwest Florida.

### Theoretical Model

Charmaz (2014) stated “Theories try to answer questions. Theories offer accounts for what happened, how it ensues, and may aim to account for why it happened.

Theorizing consists of the actions involved in constructing these accounts” (p. 228). The researcher, given the results of the data analysis, describes the relationship among the three variables from the study:

Table 8

#### *Breakdown of Instances of Sources and Focused Codes*

Focused Code	Sources	<i>N</i>
Family	14	163
Economics	15	171
Society	14	162

### Constructivist Grounded Theory

The creation of a grounded theory in this study followed the constructivist grounded theory model. Charmaz (2014) states “...a constructivist approach places priority on the standard phenomenon and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (p. 239). In this research study the participants described relationships with various phenomenon at times stemming from their childhoods all the way up to mid-adulthood that influenced college decision-making. “Constructivists study how-and sometimes why- participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 239).

The following foundational assumptions were derived from the study following Charmaz’s (2014) patterns of constructivist grounded theory. Participants assumed multiple realities in their experiences. These realities included that in some

circumstances that they needed to fit the mold of societal groups which told them that they could not amount to anything no matter what path they followed. At the same time, realities were assumed that told participants that they could be successful in short term careers while falling short of long-term realities such as declining health or changing economics. The data was also mutually constructed through interaction between the researcher and the participants. This happened as a result of interviews being driven by the reactions and flow of the participants' answers and body language. The data was driven by this interactive experience.

The next foundational assumption of the grounded theory is that the researcher constructed categories of data. These categories consisted of family, social, and economic factors. The final foundational assumption of the grounded theory "assumes the observer's values, priorities, positions, and actions affect views" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 236). As previously discussed, the researcher let the interviews and proceeding data analysis drive the findings as objectively as able, the commitment was made from the start of the research project to set aside preconceived ideas and experiences and let the data speak for itself.

Charmaz (2014) describes the objectives of constructivist grounded theory as the following: "generalizations as partial, conditional, and situated in time, space, positions, action, and interactions," as well as "aiming to create theory that has credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness" (p. 236). The participants in this study and the data which they provided were analyzed with these factors considered in regards to the time and environment in which they occurred, in addition, the goal of the theory building was to be credible, as saturation was realized with repetitive interview responses, and

usefulness of the data, findings, and recommendations is realized by the ability to turn the study into immediate actions by colleges who are interested in the core issues revolving around college men's enrollment.

The implications for the data analysis on constructivist grounded theory “acknowledges subjectiveness throughout the data analysis, engages in reflexivity throughout the research process, and seeks to re-represent participants’ views and voices as integral to the analysis” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 236). The grounded theory that was realized by this study, derived from the original thoughts, voices, and opinions of the study’s 17 participants shows us that the factors leading to the college decision-making process begin from a young age as men are shaped by the experiences of the family, friends, and environment in which they are brought up in. From a young age men are seeing gender stereotypes at work that influence them from the beginning of the point in which they start to make major life decisions such as how serious to take schooling and what the end result of schooling should mean for them. As stated in previous sections of this study, college may not be a required path for all men, however, in our changing global and diverse world, college can become a missing link even if just in regards to the influence that the now college age men, or older, are having on the younger generation which they were once a part of. The data has shown us that the combination of exposure and past experiences regarding family, social, and economic factors all combine, and sometimes pressure, men into their decision-making. In particular, gender stereotypes emerge as a key factor for men, as they seek to balance self-expectations with external expectations, both real and perceived. The decision to not go to college may not be a

problem for all men, however, the factors leading to the decisions of some men to not go to college is a problem, based on where those influencers stem from.

### **Formation of the Grounded Theory**

The central theoretical code of the study is identified as gender stereotypes. The gender stereotypes which have been made evident in this study help to form the grounded theory that males are heavily influenced in their college decision-making by numerous outlooks and assumptions thrust upon them by various interactions that stem from the environments in which they live. The data and analysis that has emerged from this study point to the model that males do not always make the major decision to attend college solely based on factors that are under their control. The grounded theory, from this study, shows us that gender stereotypes play the most significant role in males' college decision making, and the conflict in which they feel often drives their ultimate decision. The analysis of the focused codes- family, social, economics,- present the evidence that overarching stereotypes felt by males directly affect their decisions and how they feel about these decisions.

This study has taken an ambiguous path and one that according to Charmaz (2014), can sometimes be expected in a qualitative grounded theory study. This study shows us that men face major self-scrutiny as well as external scrutiny as they balance decisions on post-secondary education as well as their general place in life. The study started as a quest to define why the gender gap in college exists with a hope of identifying factors, theorized to be societal conflict that led directly to a college gender gap. What the grounded theory shows us is that men are constantly facing gender stereotypes in their everyday lives that directly influence their decisions. Men are made



to feel from families that they must lead a certain life. They are made to feel from society that they must follow a certain social norm, such as being a sole breadwinner. They also are affected by economic outlooks that attempt to influence their way of life or how they spend their money. While this study attempted to break down these factors into even more specific data points, the takeaway from this researcher is that these gender stereotypes are so ingrained in their psyches, it is hard for them to attempt to describe them in a more detailed fashion or even outwardly admit that what they are describing is anything but the accepted social roles that they have to follow.

This researcher hopes that the study increases the understanding that our society is so deep in its beliefs about what roles men should follow that we do not even realize the influence these beliefs have on gender roles, or how they subconsciously alter men's lives. The study will hopefully provide a fresh grounded theory contribution that society needs to accept that we fundamentally shape and alter every man's life, positively or negatively, by the stereotypes and expectations put upon them, and in this study specifically, how it forces men in to higher education or drives them away from it. As a result, this study should help higher education administrators to take a new look at support programs for men to not only help them enroll, but offer referrals to outside resources to men who ultimately may not benefit from a college education at that time. Colleges and universities in general admit and enroll any student who applies and meets minimum admission criteria without many other questions asked. It is time that these practices are looked at and that some resources are put in to pre-advising models to determine that men are making the best decisions for themselves and not someone else or because of a societal gender stereotype. This study should also show, even those not in

higher education, that men may not always be acting out of what is ultimately their best interest but because of an external influence which they might not even realize exists as it is buried so deep in their subconscious.

While the study did not specifically break down the experiences by race or ethnicity, the overall data and findings provide a baseline of theoretical guidelines to provide future researchers the baseline of data with which to begin. Before moving on to recommendations and conclusions it is important to revisit the central research questions and sub-questions of the study:

What societal factors seem to account for lower male-enrollment in public community college?

Based on the results of the interviews and subsequent data analysis, the research showed that societal factors do play a part in the decision-making process of males enrolling in community college. The question of whether these factors result in lower enrollment could not be significantly measured by the findings. Findings showed that societal factors influenced some to enroll in college immediately after high school graduation, while others were influenced to delay.

## 2. What are the conflict factors in the decision-making process?

Conflict can be defined very broadly and interpreted in many ways. The findings showed that conflict, and in particular conflict driven by gender stereotypes, was evident in almost every aspect of the decision-making process when it came to decisions on college enrollment. Chapter 5 outlines specifics to conflict as related to the study.

**Research sub-questions:**

What traditional gender roles play a part in males' decisions to enroll in community college within the southwest Florida region?

As outlined in many of the responses, traditional gender roles did play a part in a number of the participants' experiences. Many of these views seemed to be shaped by both a participant's personal experience as well as by societal exposure.

What are the characteristics of these traditional gender roles and are they viewed consistently by all of the participants in the research study?

Main characteristics were comprised of a traditional view of a male working to provide for his family, a view of a male not wanting to be viewed as a "bum," as well as a gender role of being presented as a positive male influence for younger family members.

If male community college students feel that societal gender views influenced and introduced personal conflict into their higher education decision making, what role, if any, did economic factors play?

Economic factors played a significant role in the decision making of most of the participants in the study. All participants indicated, to some degree, that economic factors led to the decision to enroll in college. Factors varied between economics being a reactive measure to enrolling and economic factors being a proactive reasoning for enrollment. The reactive measures were due to participants realizing that their current jobs would no longer meet their needs or that in order to advance in their current positions that a college degree was needed. Those who indicated proactive reasoning indicated that at or just after high school graduation that a college degree was needed to meet their goals, they just had not been directly affected by a job requiring a degree or

being in a position where they could no longer survive financially in their current positions.

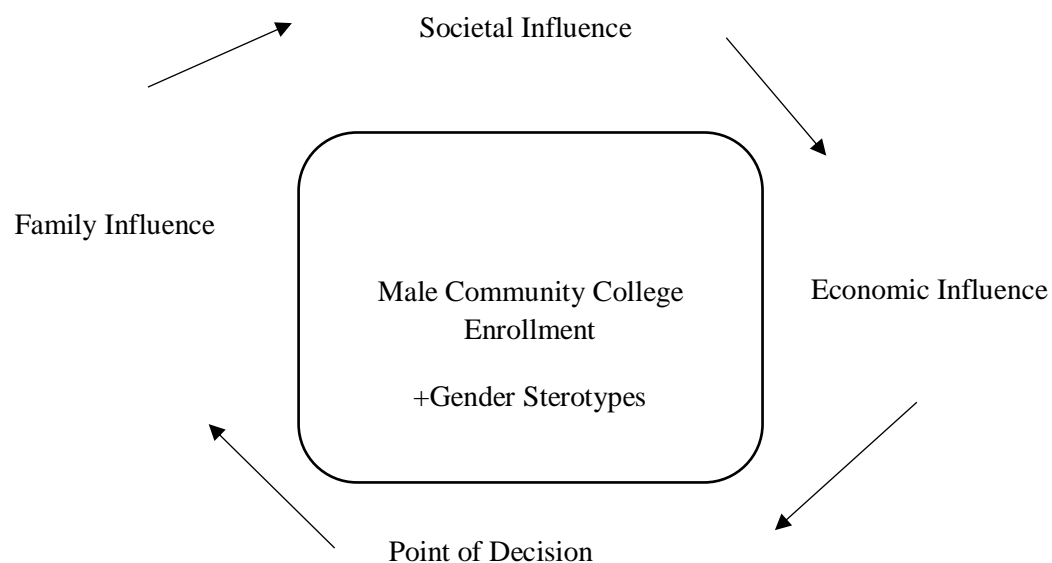
The ultimate theory of the study finds that while no one specific factor can be found for answering the question of why a gender gap in college exists, the societal and economic factors which are developed and engrained in men's psyche from an early age influence their decisions on college many years later. Men are facing issues of gender stereotyping when making major life decisions, including attending college. In many instances they do not even realize that this stereotyping is occurring. The findings are discussed in more detail, along with recommendations, in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations

The study resulted in a number of revelations and recommendations. First, there is a strong correlation between family influences when it comes to male community college enrollment. These factors ranged from wanting to be a good influence on younger family members to attempting to live up to the legacy of a parent. Second, society influenced males as well, with findings ranging from needing to “fit in” to society to the opposite feel of wanting to be an exception to what was considered the “norm” in society. Lastly, economic factors were a significant influence, ranging from the need to provide for oneself to the use of valuable veterans benefits before they expire.

The grounded theory developed in this study showed that males were influenced by a number of factors in their lives when it came to the decision to enroll in community college. The lack of positive factors, or influencers, led to a delay of an informed decision on college enrollment. It may have also led to decisions, such as taking on a job which had no long-term benefits. The data showed that those who experienced positive factors, or influencers, early on after high school or GED completion enrolled successfully in college or if they took a break in between, the break was an overall positive experience in their lives.

Figure 1 shows how the findings of the study complete a full cycle of the relationship of factors influencing males’ community college enrollment decisions.



*Figure 1.* Community college enrollment cycle and decision-making.

### **Family**

Harper and Harris (2010) stated “From students’ anecdotes, we can assume that gender roles are taught through a process in which social institutions, such as the family, play a fundamental role. The family transmits values that dictate rules of behavior that men and women should follow” (p. 184). This statement and related research by the authors (Harper and Harris, 2010), suggest that family does, in fact, play a vital role in major life decision-making; however the statement as to whether students “should” follow family’s behavior can be debated. From the results of this study, there were a larger amount of responses that stated that family was a positive influence; however, we can see examples where family may not have been a positive example, and to suggest that their history always should be followed may be a flawed one. Some participants made positive decisions in spite of negative family influences, such as overcoming an uncle who said that education was not worth the time or an older sibling who was not successful in college before the participant.

Men generally found that there was simply an expectation to “do good” by their families. Acknowledging that this study was based on research from students who made the decision to go to college (as opposed to those who have not), it can be said that family is a significant influence, whether positive or negative, on the decision to go to college. The lack of family (whether biological family or non-traditional family structures) influences most likely will cause an impact on the decision to not enroll in college.

While Harper and Harris (2010) placed some focus on family influences in the college decision making processes, this research study expanded the findings to show that at time families could be a hindrance as opposed to just a positive factor. Through the memoing process and analysis of the data derived from the initial codes, it is found that family can cause conflict in a significant number of instances, although slightly less than those who found positive family influence.

### **Recommendation**

The recommendation for this influence can be broken into two sections: those with family and those without. If family influences are vital in the college decision-making process, then an alternative to those without a family structure must be addressed. First, for those with a family structure, to address the future college success of males, colleges need to concentrate on pre-college programs, not just for high school students, or soon-to-be high school graduates, but for those non-traditional age students as well. Acknowledging that college may not be the best choice for all, programs should be designed to discuss the requirements, demands, cost, and potential payoffs of a college education. These programs need to be structured to include family members as well as to help them understand how college will affect their potential student. Many students,

whether traditional or non-traditional age, do not have an understanding of what college really means or costs, and they need their family structures to understand and assist. Considering that many of these family members may not be college graduates, it will be important to provide a program for both students and families that provides a clear understanding for those interested in college and also support individuals who may not have any college knowledge. These programs can be implemented through various departments on a college campus. These services could be an offshoot of recruitment programs that a typical admissions office offers, a student life program, or part of the programming of a parent's outreach office that some institutions offer. Additional support systems will be a benefit to the students who have had negative family influence as well. Having other individuals to count on for positive influence should make a significant difference in informed and decisive decision-making.

As the discussion of the value of a college education continues to dominate the talk of higher education in many media outlets, it will be as important as ever to include family and extended family structures. Current events show us that the current president, Barack Obama, has supported a gap year for his eldest daughter before entering college (Kamenetz, 2016) . While his daughter is a traditional aged student, it shows the great influence that family has on our decisions, and why those without family in place would benefit from similar programs where they could bring friends. These programs could even provide counselors who could play the role of family, if no family exists, to give those students a fair shot at the same decision-making analysis as those with family. With social equity being so important in today's global society, programs such as these would



help the greater good of our society for all individuals and not just those fortunate enough to have support systems.

### **Society**

The findings of the study showed that society, or perception of societal factors, plays a significant role in males' decision-making when considering community college enrollment. Mitchell et al. (2016) stated that "the importance college students place on contributing to the larger community and their self-reported development of personal and social responsibility" (p. 317) are contributing factors from peer-to-peer discussions. The peer-to-peer discussions seem to be a foundation in which further understanding of our place in society can be discussed and better understood. The participants in this study also were affected by societal outlooks on them as males in both positive and negative ways. Mitchell et al. (2016) stated: "The integration of a critical understanding of social issues into community-based experiences should allow students to engage in more meaningful reflection and discussion" (p. 316). The study showed that males, as with when most individuals who are considering major life decisions or steps, are influenced by what others like them are doing, or not doing. In order to make the best and most educated decision for themselves, they need to consider their personal needs and the needs of their families. This decision may be to attend college, or to choose not to attend, if that is the best for their specific situation. The decision should be made from factors that are relevant to their specific needs and only from limited artificial external factors.

While sorting through the memoed data, it is clear that the participants' responses made the case, as theorized, that societal influences play a significant part in the way that men view the college enrollment process. The participants in the study made significant

statements which support the idea that they feel societies' outlook on them has influenced, both positively and negatively, decisions on their future and college enrollment.

### **Recommendation**

Peer-to-peer mentoring for male students at colleges or at other community organizations should be a must for all males making major life decisions. While a limited numbers of institutes of higher education do offer male mentoring programs, they are almost exclusively for students already enrolled in their institution. Through the admissions or outreach areas of community colleges, mentorship programs can be set up to assist males in the uniqueness of the decision-making process of college. While some institutions provide programs like this for students already enrolled, it is not necessarily commonplace to see it at the initial stage of college admissions. The challenge will continue to be to persuade males to participate actively in programs such as these. Having qualified males who have been through similar experiences (perhaps realized through a matching program) would help these prospective college students in making their decisions. Through personal experience, this researcher has seen too many males (and students of all genders) fail to pursue a goal or follow the correct path for their future simply due to not having the correct influences and to doubting themselves unnecessarily. They need to be mentored and to be able to actively discuss their needs and personal situations with someone who can understand and provide positive feedback. This researcher recommends that colleges and non-profit organizations take a serious look at providing strong mentoring programs for males and in a manner that will get them to

participate and be retained in the programs. These types of programs should reduce on what could become years of conflict resolution needs for these individuals.

It is also important for colleges to engage, and not shy away from, addressing the perception that some men might feel a case of challenged racial privilege. This is an important development factor which is becoming more important as society continues to grow in diverse ways. Educational experiences that show that growing your experiences and understanding of diversity should not be viewed as a negative experience but one which helps to grow individual outlooks and factors.

### **Economic Factors**

The third variable of the study was economic factors. A number of the study participants cited economics in their decision-making on community college enrollment. This ranged from simply wanting to be middle-class, to being wealthy, to being able to pay the bills, to not wanting to miss out on valuable military veteran's benefits. Hinz (2016) stated "...colleges can encourage a healthy class transition by providing support with student organizations, role models, and coursework" (p. 285). At the root of the majority of college-making decisions comes money and a possible change in class status. Some participants have the mindset of working to advance in class and others just the mindset of working to get by, with the perception that a college education was needed just in order to "get by and be middle-class." This outlook can be debated in many ways. However, one certainty is that college is a major life decision that, although it may result in more money in the future, it will cost money, at least in the short term. This very topic of college affordability and effectiveness is a very active topic in today's society, as evidenced in the 2016 presidential campaign. Hinz (2016) stated "One's class identity is

as complex as social class itself; both are constructed by multiple elements” (p. 294).

Fundamentally, this researcher believes that our country needs a monumental shift in how we explain the pros and cons of college and how it may affect one’s economic standings. Some colleges are beginning to do a better job in explaining the costs of college and how to pay for college, although others have a way to go on this topic. However, more needs to be done to help young men to understand what happens after college and what a degree will mean, or not mean, in economic terms. Interestingly, it appears that the focused codes of social influence and economic influence can be grouped together for the most significant finding and theory of this study. This is due to the fact that men seem to be most influenced by societal views of their masculinity and gender which in turn, has a direct effect on their outlooks on jobs and economic growth and stability. When men see society viewing them as too masculine for college, they might jump into careers which may pay well, but are short term. Conversely, if they feel as if society has given up on them, or do not have high expectations of them, they may then decide to not put forth the effort into college, may not work at all, or may work in lower paying jobs not meant for long term growth and financial stability.

### **Recommendation**

More programs providing broader ranges of financial literacy are needed in community colleges. Introduction to College courses are providing some basic needs in terms of finances, but not necessarily the bigger picture of how long student loans may take to pay off as well as how college debt will compare to average incomes of different majors, as well as cost comparisons for completing 4-year degrees at a Florida state/community college as compared to Florida state universities. Like the peer

mentoring options listed previously, these programs can be offered by non-profit community organizations as well as by institutes of higher education. These programs can help males make informed and educated decisions on how community college may or may not help them towards their goals, but, most importantly, the possible financial impact of those decisions.

### **Overall Finding and Recommendation of the Study**

The emerging theme from the study shows that social and economic influences combine to have the largest impact on the college enrollment decisions of college men. When viewing through the lens of the participants, their positive and negative interactions with family paired with the need for economic stability both short and long term had the most effect on their decisions. However, the study could not positively identify these factors as contributing to the gender gap in college but helped to show that these factors are main influencers on the decision-making process.

Although the study could not find a definite link between the findings and the gender gap in college, the link with conflict is evident. Wilmot and Hocker (2007) state:

Membership in the “gender club” remains exclusive for all of your life, exerting one of the several powerful, pervasive influences on your developing conflict repertoire. Your own gender and the gender of those with whom you engage in conflict affects 1) your behavior and 2) your views (p. 53).

Wilmot and Hocker (2007) define perspectives of conflict in a number of ways including social learning theory, where individuals are assumed to learn to be male or female based on communication and observation (p. 54). This study shows us that men begin to develop their outlooks and decisions on major life events, including college, while at

home and with family or friends. Their economic outlooks also drive decision-making. As they are influenced and developed by these factors the social learning theory begins to take hold and they begin to base decisions on how they feel they should be developing.

Ultimately, community colleges need to realize and accept that lower male enrollment is a fact and will have a larger impact on enrollment and success rates. While programs aimed at some special populations already exist at community colleges, programs for men that are structured to address the unique conflict influencers which they face from family, social, and economic factors. These programs, and those who administer them, need to also have an understanding of social learning theory in order to have a grasp on how men are perceiving themselves and their role and place in society. Men, themselves, also need to be willing to accept the help which will be offered through such programs. The challenge will be to empower men to seek the guidance that can be provided and to understand how valuable taking an extra step to fully understand the positives and negatives of major life decisions can be.

### **Strengths of the Study**

#### **Diverse Population of Male Students**

The study consisted of 17 community college males enrolled as first time in college. The population of participants was one of a diverse nature including the following self-identified races: seven White, four Black, four Hispanic, and two Asian. The group also consisted of birth years ranging from 1959-1998, as well as years of high school graduation or GED completion from 1981-2015. For a sample population of 17, the varied backgrounds of the participants helped bring strength and validity to the research study. The varied backgrounds in a small group was possible due to the diversity

of a state community college setting. The varied backgrounds of the participants adds the theory that college men, regardless of demographics, benefit from strong support systems when making major life decisions such as attending college, or following different paths to prepare for the future. While no two participants had identical backgrounds, the data shows that men in this study have more in common than what may be realized when it comes to need for support. Some may have no support, while others may have had support but it may have been negative. A negative example is one in which a family member may have influenced the participant to follow a road that led to a dead-end job or a job that may only be set up for success for a few years in the event of an injury or aging, such as construction, with no educational backup for the future.

### **Only Community College Level Studied**

The study provided a strong pool of participants at the community college level and the researcher feels that the data obtained will be very valuable to current and future studies in the same scholarly areas and is a strength of the study. There can be more findings when studying students at either the university level (4-year to post-graduate) or at technical colleges, which focus almost exclusively on vocational areas of study. Different conclusions may be obtained for future researchers focusing on these types of post-secondary institutions.

### **Unexpected Findings**

The research found that there are a variety of influences on males' community college enrollment decisions. The literature presented in Chapter 2 supported that there are differences between the histories of college enrollment for males and females, including the reasons for going to college. Theories abound on gender roles and societal

influences. However, what may be surprising to some is that males were shown in this study to be influenced heavily by the pursuit of being a positive role model for family and younger generations. Assumptions could be made before the study that males were motivated simply by the pursuit of self-gain.

The researcher also found the willingness of the participants in the study to open up and discuss a number of very sensitive issues and have emotional responses. This assisted in gaining very valuable insight to the data. In addition, the participants showed their continued faith in the value of higher education. This is in the face of today's media continually questioning the value of higher education. As discussed, higher education may not be the most appropriate option for all; however, those who know that it is the best option for them understand that the value cannot be measured.

### **Potential Limitations of the Study**

When completing this research study there were a few potential drawbacks identified.

#### **One Area of the Country and State**

This study focused on the southwest region of the state of Florida. Similar studies conducted in either other areas of Florida or the United States may yield different results for future researchers. Regional and cultural differences throughout the country could provide valuable data for further research findings, a standard occurrence with qualitative research studies.

#### **Gender**

As the core of the study, only students identifying as males were interviewed. This essentially eliminated 50% of the possible college students who could be



interviewed. Future researchers could conduct future similar studies to include students identifying as female.

### **College Payment Options**

Participants were not questioned about how they were paying for college; possible options include the use of federal financial aid, private student loans, scholarships, or cash (out-of-pocket). This was realized as a potential drawback due to the possibility that the participants' experiences and perceptions could be skewed due to how they are paying for their college experience. This question was not asked due the concern of possible polarizing answers to the question of college and cost. In the researcher's experience, many college students feel "left behind" by financial aid processes. As an example many feel that they do not qualify for enough financial aid but for different reasons. Higher income students many times feel as though they are penalized for their parents making too much money, while lower income students feel that they are not awarded enough aid to cover their college costs. Because this study was focused more on the social influences for going to college, it was decided to avoid this possible very polarizing question for the study. However, this question can be part of a future study on a similar topic.

### **What Was Not Considered?**

In addition to drawbacks listed previously, there are a few items that were not considered in the study: recruiting participants of specific ethnic or cultural backgrounds or with specific majors, or participants who were first generation in college (all participants were first time in college, however). These are areas where, for future

studies, sub-categories could be created. It is the researcher's hope that future scholars have the resources to do more in-depth studies using some of these factors.

### **What Was Learned from the Study?**

The researcher learned a number of items from this study. First, the study of community college students and their specific reasoning for enrolling, or not enrolling in college, immediately after high school graduation/GED completion is a significant study with many variables that in no way fit neatly into a similar box. Also, the men who participated in the study showed an eagerness to read the final study, when completed, and understand how their contributions helped to enrich the findings. This is important because as a recommendation I ask that men take an active role in helping those behind them to understand and make educated decisions on whether college is right for them.

### **What Would Be Done Differently?**

If the researcher were to choose items to be completed differently, it would be the following two situations. First, the researcher would have considered recruiting participants from more than only one course considered to be first "year," possibly recruiting from an English Composition I course, as this may have resulted in yielding participants who were non-degree status and would have resulted in more varied experiences. Students in the SLS 1515 course were all degree-seeking students. Secondly, the researcher would have held similar interviews at a second public community college within the region, as it would have been interesting to compare. However, due to timing and resources, this was not a possibility.

### **Predispositions**

Before beginning the data collection process, the researcher created a self-analysis of any pre-disposed thoughts and possible theories on the gender gap in college and the influence that external factors may have on it, as part of the memoing process.

Acknowledging that the researcher has approximately 15 years of working professionally in higher education, it helped to compartmentalize any pre-notions prior to starting the data collection. This enabled the researcher to take the scholarly approach and not let any biases or any pre-research study feelings affect the study.

### **Prior to the Study**

Prior to the study, the researcher felt that a gender gap in college might be defined more readily by studying and gaining insight from the participants about what caused a “gap year(s)” in enrollment from high school/GED completion to community college enrollment. Such factors as society seeing men as not being as proactive as women and men not being as motivated were factors the researcher thought may have emerged as a main theory of the study as opposed to the level of influence that family and economics play.

### **Post-Observation**

The researcher found it very interesting that while completing the literature review there was very limited literature found on the exact topic being studied: specific reasoning behind the gender gap in college. There are many factors leading up to the gender gap in college, and it is such a broad and complex issue facing our society today, that the exact reasoning cannot be pinpointed. The researcher believes, however, that a consortium of support programs and an understanding of challenges that males face in an

ever-changing society must be implemented in order to encourage more males who would benefit from attending community college to do just that.

### **Aligning with the Literature**

After creating the grounded theory of this study, the researcher compared the results with a few key pieces of the literature review to compare with the findings of the data. Cheney (2013) discussed how men themselves seem to miss their own needs when discussing gender balances. In the findings of this dissertation, it seems evident that men do realize that external factors exist when discussing their lives and roles in society, however the participants in this study seemed genuinely surprised that someone was studying this issue and had considered it an issue that needed to be studied and addressed. It seems as if Cheney (2013) was hinting that this was the case, although not stating it succinctly. After completing this study it is evident that more research and attention needs to be placed on the conflict between men and societies' views on their gender.

DeBell (2007) questioned the relationship of children and fathers and what effect this has on long-term well-being of the child. DeBell (2007) states that while many theories discuss this important issue, not much hard research supports the theories. The findings of this dissertation show that while the relationship with family is a significant factor in the decisions that males make in regards to college decision-making, the relationship with their fathers was not pinpointed as a major factor. This finding can also serve as a major topic on a future research study.

Harper and Harris (2010) described male gender role conflict (MGRC) and how it affects men's perceptions of education and specifically a college education. Their

findings support that in some instances, pursuing an education is considered feminine or gay. The findings of the dissertation research found that some participants felt that they encountered similar experiences as they were growing up and developing into adults who needed to make major life decisions such as pursuing an education. This is an opportunity for society to be challenged to reframe not just views on education but also what constitutes being a “man” and the traits which are associated with it. This is further discussed in chapter 5 and the relationship between this study and the role of conflict.

### **Contribution to the Research**

This study contributes to the current body of research. Although little research was found on this very specific topic, many pieces of literature existed on supporting the topics as discussed in Chapter 2 of the study. The researcher feels that the new data and findings have helped to better define some of the topics that already exist on the topic of gender roles and higher education choices. It is also hoped that this study spurs further in-depth and scholarly research that will benefit males in the future, in addition to benefiting colleges as they continue to refine how to best serve and support their students.

### **Current Gender Roles and Conflict**

In the literature review, existing literature was examined to study current gender roles and conflict. The statement in the literature review about the conflict of where males fit in gender society can impact directly how males decide to pursue higher education, of whether they pursue it at all. As demonstrated from participant feedback and from the results of the data, it was shown that conflict, at many different levels, influences males’ decisions. Cheney’s (2013) views were that males were positively influenced by participating in gender equity activities because they can have a positive

effect on their female family members. I believe that this study also shows that males can become personally satisfied with decisions they make. In the end, this will positively affect their family members as well as helping themselves.

One of the current topics that has become a larger national conversation since the start of this research and one that I believe needs to be studied is the role transgender individuals and how they integrate into everyday society, and whether most people are aware when they are interacting with an individual who may be transgender. The specific topic of transgender students is an emerging one and while this study did not specifically ask whether a participant was transgender, transgender students were not omitted from the study criteria. The criteria specifically asked for male identifying students and, as a result, there may have been transgender students in the pool of 17 participants. Kelly and McGee (2012) stated:

Gender roles are based on stereotypical behavior for males (masculine) and females (feminine). Individuals with a feminine gender role tend to be more submissive, loyal, nurturing, and affectionate. Conversely, those with a masculine gender role tend to be more decisive, dominate, aggressive, and independent.

(p. 2)

This research will help assist in showing that the stereotypes Kelly and McGee (2012) described can be broken out when one comes to understand what affects the decision-making process of males when choosing major life decisions like community college enrollment. The influence of family members, the desire to be a good influence, and the goal of being a positive member of society, as well as wanting to prove societal stereotypes wrong, show that not all males can be described as “decisive, dominate, or

even aggressive.” Further research that takes the time to study further male identifying students’ decision-making patterns will continue to support this current research, which found that males also need support, both from family and from external resources, to make fully informed decisions that are best for them and for their families.

### **Community Colleges and Challenges Facing Higher Education**

This research can help assist community college administrators and decision makers to continue to make the best policies for their students and the colleges. Performance-based funding, retention rates, graduation rates, and job placement are becoming a reality for state community colleges in the state of Florida. This poses a unique challenge to community colleges; as open-enrollment institutions (admission based only on successful completion of a standard high school diploma or state issued GED), community colleges must be prepared to move students through to graduation and job placement, no matter how unprepared these students may be at the point of initial enrollment. This contribution of this study to the administrators of community colleges shows that while some male students may be unprepared for the rigors of college level academic work will need to be supported in their decision to enroll in college and that it is the right decision to make; this also holds true for those students who are prepared. Community colleges may need to step out of their normal comfort zones of enrolling as many students as possible and ensure that students are making the right decisions, whether it is to go immediately into the workforce, take time off, enroll in a technical trade school, or attend community college. The results of this study showed that so many practical and emotional aspects play a part in these decisions. As quickly as the world and society is changing, these students must have an outlet to have concerns heard and have a

professional to help guide them towards the proper path for them, whether it is short-term or long-term. Not only is this the right thing to do for the individual, it is the right thing for colleges, in order to enroll and support students who are motivated, prepared, and in the right place in their lives to be successful college students. If they are not, a proper life-step should be recommended. As much as the researcher supports higher education, I believe this research shows that students, and in particular male identifying students, should enroll in college when they are both emotionally and socially ready to do so.

### **Contributions to the Field of Conflict Resolution Studies**

The findings of this study can contribute to conflict resolution studies, and the sub-areas of conflict resolution studies including gender and conflict, college student affairs and conflict. This can also include structures of society such as race, class, and gender identity. The study of enrollment and other issues affecting higher education is one that aligns closely with that of conflict resolution studies. In fact, today's society is faced with questions related to higher education almost every news cycle. Topics from college affordability, relevance of a college degree, and the concern raised that some institutions might be classified by some as unscrupulous, such as for-profit schools like ITT Tech, are not only affecting those thinking about college but also raising questions for college administrators as well. The following section addresses some of the topics covered in the area of gender and conflict as well as within the course title that shares the same name and are part of the conflict resolution studies curriculum.

### **Decision-Making Beyond Oneself**

Today's society can be viewed as divided and conflicted as ever. One does not need to look much further than the current political issues, views on terrorism,



immigration, gender identity, same-sex marriage, and social welfare programs. This study has shown that males need to have external involvement in their lives when determining decisions on major life events like college attendance. Just a few decades ago, going to college may have seemed like an easy decision to make; many people simply did it, and it did not seem like a life event worthy of a research study. However, in the changing climate, the decision to go to college affects us from finances to social class to future lifestyle, and possibly even the ability to retire someday. The latter could be viewed either way as some see a college education as the pathway to a good job leading to retirement while some see it as an unnecessary financial burden that may prevent them from ever retiring because of student loan balances that make take them well into their 60s or 70s to pay off.

### **Gender Polarization**

For males to make sound decisions when it comes to community college enrollment, including whether they even should attend college and, if so, when the best time to do so is, they need a support system that can be absent of undue societal influences but made up of their personal support system. This support system should be composed of their family/personal social structure as well as community organizations that can help to proactively advise in a neutral setting. The days of going to college simply because it is the natural next step after high school seem to be over. Today's prospective students need to treat this decision as one that should be a positive influence on their lives, but one that, if not chosen correctly or for the correct reasons, could have long-lasting negative effects on their futures. This type of decision is a very emotional one and challenges the theory of gender polarization. Bem (1993) stated:

Gender polarization operates in two related ways. First, it defines mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female. Second, it defines any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts as problematic - as unnatural or immoral from a religious perspective or as biologically anomalous or psychologically pathological from a scientific perspective. (p. 80-81)

Males need to feel that not only can they break away from the feeling that they “must” go to college, but also from a stereotype that they cannot make a major life decision by using a highly emotional and personal process such as having heart-to-heart talks with family or by seeking external assistance with a non-profit or other community organization offering them help. This also challenges the notion of patriarchy, which positions males in roles viewed as making decisions and having most of the influence, except when they decide they want to give up the power of influence of decision-making. This outdated ritual is challenged when males need that external influence to help guide them in these major life decisions. Society must be challenged on these old ways of thinking and influence. The men in this study seemed genuinely surprised that someone was taking the time to ask them about how they view their roles in society, as well as how they feel society has defined them and may have put them in a predetermined box of how to feel and act. It is this researcher’s hope that studies such as these can begin further conversations as a starting point and influence future studies to dive deeper in to this issue.

### **Conflict Resolution in Higher Education**

Community colleges, and all institutes of higher education, are facing a challenge of identity being caused by politics, society, and finances. The very students who enroll

in their programs, including males, are navigating through these same transitions as the institutions themselves. As evidenced by the data and analysis of findings, the variables that influence males' decisions to enroll in college may not present hard evidence of why a gender gap exists; however, the study showed that males indeed are in need of guidance and proper influence when it comes to making these major life decisions. The conflict created by societal influences, both positive and negative, can influence an individual's decision-making and create a direct need for the skills of conflict resolution. The ability to consider options from valid trusted sources is crucial. This study directly contributes to conflict resolution studies by showing that no matter how much data and information one may feel they have in regards to embarking on a higher education journey, the positives and negatives of the future and past journeys undertaken should play an immense role in helping them grow into the roles that they are meant to have in life. Conflict is inevitable; however, how we handle and grow from it is what shapes our world and the world in which we live.

Finally, a narrative is made for changes to society due to the findings of this study showing us that men are facing the issue of gender stereotyping when making major life decisions, including attending college. In many instances men do not even realize that this stereotyping is occurring. In the context of this study, men face cultural narratives predetermined by society that attempts to influence them from very early on in life and as they begin to craft their own personal ways in the world. The motto of "society can change" is very well versed for this issue. From family life to politics men are faced every day with harmful views and stereotypes in terms of masculinity. This conflict can cause men to make decisions which may not be the best for their futures and are

shortsighted in the possible greatness that they can achieve. When young men are subjected to the views that college, and any type of academia, are not paths to masculinity, or that college is just for building a social reputation, society is harming the future. When we are able to achieve the moment in which all types of harmful social narratives are no longer influencing how men are making decisions, and men are able to make unbiased decisions, void of harmful stereotypes, we will be taking an additional step in the direction of equality and will be addressing one aspect of the overall problem of social equality. As a result of this research study, the researcher challenges the same men who persevered these stereotypes and had successful college careers to mentor and assist those men coming behind them to look beyond any negative societal influencers to make informed decisions on what is best for them, instead of what society believes are the decisions that they should make. Through these recommendations, we can begin to reduce gender conflict and address the challenges men face in making wise choices about career, college and family.

## References

- American Association of Community Colleges. (2016, February). 2016 fact sheet.
- Are men being neutered by society? (2012). *USA Today*, 140(2800). Retrieved from  
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/pqcentral/docview/920894081/1C194A40E7394BACPQ/1?accountid=6579>
- Bailey, R. (2009, November 11). Affirmative action for males - Gender discrimination in college admissions [Web log post]. Retrieved from  
<http://reason.com/blog/2009/11/11/affirmative-action-for-males-g>
- Basham, M. J., Campbell, D. F., & Mendoza, P. (2008). Critical issues facing America's community colleges: A summary of the community college futures assembly 2008. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 32(11), 857-870.  
 doi: 10.1080/10668920802432089
- Bem, S. L. (1993). *The lenses of gender: Transforming the debate on sexual inequity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Bennett, W. J. (2011). *The book of man: Readings on the path to manhood*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Bettinger, E. P., & Long, B. T. (2005). Do faculty serve as role models? The impact of instructor gender on female students. *Understanding Teacher Quality*, 95(2), 152-157. Available at  
<http://cepa.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/000282805774670149.pdf>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Cheney, M. (2013). Men in gender equity: Who is coming to the table? *Women in Higher Education*, 22(8), 7. Available at  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/whe.10486/abstract>
- Coleman, J. M., & Franiuk, R. (2010). Perception of mothers and fathers who take temporary work leave. *Sex Roles*, 64(5-6), 311-323. Available at  
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-010-9918-8>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- D'Amico, M. M., Friedel, J. N., Katsinas, S. G., Thornton, Z. M. (2014). Current developments in community college performance funding. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(2-3), 231-241. Available at  
<http://eric.ed.gov/?q=%22%22&ffl=subSchool+Surveys&id=EJ1022758>
- Deats, S. M., & Lenker, L. T. (Eds.). (1994). *Gender and academe: Feminist pedagogy and politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- DeBell, M (2007). Children living without their fathers: population estimates and indicators of educational well-being. *Soc Indic Res*, 87, 427-443. doi:  
 10.1107/s11205-007-9149-8
- Dortch, S. (1997). What if men didn't go to college? *American Demographics*, 19(12), 40. Retrieved from  
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/docview/200610177?accountid=6579>
- Duflo, E. (2012). Women empowerment and economic development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50, 1051-1079. doi: 10.1257/jel.50.4.1051

- Edwards, K. E., & Jones, S. R. (2009) Putting my man face on: A grounded theory of college men's gender identity development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(2), 210-228. Available at <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ835646>
- England, P., & Li, S. (2006). Desegregation stalled: The changing gender composition of college majors, 1971-2002. *Gender and Society*, 20(5), 657-677. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/27640921?sid=21105575877041&uid=3739256&uid=4&uid=3739600&uid=2>
- Evergreen, M. C. (2013). The case for a stay-at-home dad. *University Wire*, Opinion Section. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/docview/1441294346?accountid=6579>
- Harper, S. R., & Harris, F. III (Eds.). (2010). *College men and masculinities: Theory, research, and implications for practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Johnston, C. D. (2010). Motivators of adult women enrolled in a community college. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3439264)
- Kamenetz, A. (2016, May 3). How to have a successful gap year – Tips for Malia Obama and other high school grads. *nprEd*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/05/03/476506144/how-to-have-a-successful-gap-year-tips-for-malia-obama-and-other-high-school-gra>
- Keen, Sam. (1992). *Fire in the belly: on being a man*. New York: Bantam Books

- Kennedy, D.H., Terrell, S.R., Lohle, M. (2015). A grounded theory study of persistence in a limited-residency doctoral program. *The Qualitative Report*, 20 (3), 215-230.  
Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20/3/kennedy4.pdf>
- Lopez, M.H., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2014). *Women's college enrollment gains leave men behind*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center website:  
<http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/06/womens-college-enrollment-gains-leave-men-behind/>
- Magolda, M. B. B. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass.
- Malone, C. (2012). What's the Point of College? *The American Prospect*, 23 (3), 74.
- Martinez Dolan, D., Young, E.A., Cesario, S., & Symes, L. (2015). Arriving at success: academic management by Hispanic nursing students during their first semester of a baccalaureate program. *Hispanic Health Care International*, 13, 140-150. doi: 10.1891/1540-4153.13.3.140
- McGinley, A. C. (2013). Masculinity, labor, and sexual power. *Boston University Law Review*, 93(3), 795-813. Available at  
<http://www.bu.edu/bulawreview/files/2013/08/MCGINLEY.pdf>
- Meyerhoff, M. K. (2011). Gender roles for a new generation. *Pediatrics for Parents*, 27(7/8), 8. Available at  
<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/70217584/gender-roles-new-generation>



- Perrakis, A. I. (2008). Factors promoting academic success among African American and White male community college students [Special Issue: Gendered Perspectives on Community Colleges]. *New Direction for Community Colleges*, 142(Summer), 15-23. doi: 10.1002/cc.321
- Pouget, E., Serbin, L., Stack, D., Ledingham, J., Schwartzman, A. (2012). The intergenerational continuity of fathers' absence in a socioeconomically disadvantaged sample. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 540-555. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00962.x
- Recession hurt male self-image; Breadwinners role altered. (2010). *The Province*. [Vancouver, B.C.]. A.24. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/docview/365888722?accountid=6579>
- Rutherford, J. (2012, March 8). How to be a man: Jonathan Rutherford versus Natasha Walter [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2012/03/women-sex-rutherford-feminism>
- Schellenberg, J. A. (1996). *Conflict resolution: Theory, research, and practice*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Tanner, J., & Cockerill, R. (1996). Gender, social change, and the professions: The case of pharmacy. *Sociological Forum*, 11(4), 643-660. Available at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02425311>

- Topper, A. M., & Powers, J. M. (2013). Democracy's challenge: The American community college in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Framing the issue. *Education Policy and Analysis Archives*, 21(14), 1-7. Available at <http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/2750/275029728014.pdf>
- Townsend, B. K. (2008). Community colleges as gender-equitable institutions [Special Issue: Gendered Perspectives on Community Colleges]. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 142(Summer), 7-14. Available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cc.320/abstract>
- van Dijk, T. A. (Ed.). (1997). *Discourse as social interaction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Where are the male community-college students? Where are the female auto-mechanics. (2002, July 26). [Letter to the Editor]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Where-Are-the-Male/26010/>
- Wilmot, W., & Hocker, J. (2007). *Interpersonal conflict*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Wingfield, K. (2013). War on men hurts society. *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, News Section [Atlanta, GA], A.18. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/docview/1367743960?accountid=6579>
- Yeboah, T.; Serbeh, R.; Bembir, P. (2015). Omission of men from gender-development theory and praxis: a pathway for addressing the plights of women? *Journal of Social Sciences*, 20 (4), 7-19.

## Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

MEMORANDUM

To: **Mark Bokowski**  
College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

From: **Randy Denis, BS, RN,**  
Center Representative, Institutional Review Board

Date: **November 18, 2015**

Re: **IRB #: 2015-126; Title, "The Gender Gap in College: Understanding the Societal Effects of Male Enrollment in a Public Community College in Southwest Florida and the Role of Conflict in Their Decision-Making"**

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under **45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 2)**. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Randy Denis, BS, RN, respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

Cc: **Dr. Cheryl Duckworth**  
**Dr. Ismael Muvingi**

## Appendix B: Informed Consent

### Adult/General Informed Consent

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled-  
**The Gender Gap in College: Understanding the Societal Effects of Male Enrollment in a  
 Public Community College in Southwest Florida and the Role of Conflict in Their Decision-  
 Making**

Funding Source: None

IRB protocol #: 2015-126

Researcher:

Mark Bukowski, MPA

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:  
 Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)  
 Nova Southeastern University  
 (954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790  
[IRB@nsu.nova.edu](mailto:IRB@nsu.nova.edu)

#### Site Information

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

#### What is the study about?

Mark Bukowski is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of this study is to understand the barriers and societal influences which exist and influence males' decisions to enroll in community college. The intent of this study is to help inform colleges on the trends in male enrollment and to make suggestions for recruitment and retention methods for male college students.

#### Why are you asking me?

The research involves interviewing at least 15 first time in college students (students

Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

whose enrollment at [REDACTED] is their first time in college).

**What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be meeting with the researcher for an approximate 45-60 minute sit down interview. In the interview the researcher will be simply asking questions regarding your decisions to enroll in college in addition to some questions regarding family background and demographics. All questions are voluntary and as a participant you have the right to not answer any of the questions that are asked. As the interview moves along, the researcher may ask additional questions that appear relevant to the research that are realized during the process.

**Is there any audio or video recording?**

The interviews will be audio recorded to assist the researcher with transcribing the interview data.

This research project will be audio recorded using a digital recorder. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher only. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher. The recording will be kept securely in a locked drawer in the researcher's office. The recording will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by data deletion. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

**What are the dangers to me?**

There may be minimal risk involved in participating in this study, however not anything additional than completing a typical person to person interview is anticipated. If you have any concerns about the risks/benefits of participating in this study, or receive a research-related injury, you can contact the researcher, Mark Bukowski, the Nova Southeastern University IRB, or the [REDACTED] at the contact information at the top of page 1.

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?**

Please understand that although you may not benefit directly from participation in this study, you have the opportunity to enhance opportunities for future male college students.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information private?**

All data will be kept on a password protected flash drive for 36 months and the audio recordings will be stored in a locked file on an electronic recorder for 36 months. No identifying information will be kept in regards to names or personal information of the participants. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and the dissertation chair may review research records.

**What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

**Other Considerations:**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the researcher.

Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled: The Gender Gap in College: Understanding the Societal Effects of Male Enrollment in a Public Community College in Southwest Florida and the Role of Conflict in Their Decision-Making

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions

1. What year were you born?
2. How do you best describe your marital status?
3. What degree are you working toward in college?
4. What year did you graduate from high school or earn a GED diploma?
5. Can you describe to me the factors which influenced you to enroll in college?
6. In your own words please list what you feel you will gain from completing your college degree/certificate
7. How would you best describe your personal societal view on family breadwinners
8. How would you describe your relationship, if any, with your father?
9. How would you describe your family's income growing up?
10. Did you experience any conflicting feelings in your decision to attend college?



## Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

## SPRING SEMESTER 2016 SLS 1515 STUDENTS



### OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN A “GENDER GAP IN COLLEGE” STUDY.

Volunteers needed to assist in a qualitative dissertation study at [REDACTED]. Do you meet the following recommended criteria?

- A male identifying [REDACTED] student currently enrolled in SLS 1515.
- Able to schedule an approximate 30-40 minute interview session to answer some simple questions regarding factors which affected your enrollment in college.

If interested, please email Mark Bukowski at [mark.bukowski@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:mark.bukowski@[REDACTED]). With schedule pre-coordination, I can also travel to all [REDACTED] locations. After emailing me, an informed consent form will be emailed to you with further information.

Mark Bukowski is completing research for his dissertation study regarding “The Gender Gap in College”.

**Are you a male  
identifying student  
at [REDACTED] currently  
in SLS 1515?**

**Are you interested  
in assisting in a  
research based  
dissertation  
study?**

**MARK BUKOWSKI**

[Mark.Bukowski@\[REDACTED\]](mailto:Mark.Bukowski@[REDACTED])

239-489-9067

## Appendix E: Initial Codes

1. Need to feel middle class
2. Keep food in the refrigerator
3. Norm for the family to go to college
4. Sisters went to college so should I
5. Dad went to college
6. Had no choice
7. Felling that all decent jobs need a college degree
8. Degree needed to be in management
9. Soon even office support staff will need a degree
10. Alternative was to join the military
11. Didn't want to be "bumming it"
12. A little stress now worth a good job later
13. Food service and other "summer" type jobs not cutting it
14. Just knew I needed to go to college
15. At age 18, needed progress in my life
16. Had to either work or go to school to be allowed to live at home
17. Dad was main breadwinner, I feel I need to do the same
18. Did not want to just play video games
19. Not acceptable in society to just be sitting around
20. Males are expected to "just get through high school"- wanted more
21. Society a big factor in how I see myself
22. After obtaining a GED, got in to drugs
23. Delayed college for decent paying job for a young adult
24. Father was doctor, could not live up to that right away
25. Wife is successful college grad, now I want to be
26. Was deployed overseas, now on reserve duty, making most of time
27. Do not want to waste VA benefits
28. Middle child, need to live up to older siblings, set a good example for younger
29. Had a baseball scholarship out of high school, but legal trouble (arrest) got in the way
30. Withdrew from family after parents divorced, cause of delay/ lack of motivation
31. Has a good job in banking, but needs degree to continue to advance
32. Worked in family produce business, but need to get out on my own
33. Both parents own their own business, but these days I feel as if I have to have a degree to do that (neither parent has a degree)
34. College not an option right out of high school due to cost
35. No talk of college with family until first job basically required it for advancement
36. Girlfriend was staying in area to go to college, decided I did not need to

37. Stepfather pressured me to go to college, I put it off to spite him for three years
38. Just was not financially feasible until I was older and realized how financial aid worked
39. Neither parent went to college so I had no real guidance and my high school failed me in preparing me for such a big decision
40. I had no motivation to start college right away, I was making enough money at McDonald's to pay for gas and alcohol
41. I was offered a job at my friend's dad's construction company, it was good money for an 18 year old, until I got older and physically could not do it anymore
42. Started college right away, my whole family did, it was not an option to not, family is white collar and highly educated
43. I started right after HS graduation because the college visited my school, the representative helped me a lot, I even received a scholarship
44. In my neighborhood, it wasn't cool to go on to college, it was barely acceptable to graduate from high school, you were viewed as a "softy" if you excelled at school
45. Once I was older, my job advancement stopped because I was competing against the college-educated, even though I had more real experience
46. I partially decided to go back to school to be the best example for my sons
47. I qualify for post-9/11 GI benefits, I cannot let them go to waste
48. It was hard to enroll after tours of combat, I was in class with students and professors who really had no real world experience outside a classroom, I risked my life in a foreign land and lost a limb for the country
49. I started college about 3 years after HS graduation, I would like my wife to be able to stay home, if she chooses to, I feel the need to be sole provider for my family
50. I felt as if society was telling me, as a male, that I should not go to college, go make money right away, so I put it off for numerous years
51. I didn't want to disappoint my family by not going to college, but I did poorly, it took years to get the courage to reenroll at start again
52. Two of my best friends joined the military after high school, I did too, it seemed like the right path to take at that moment
53. My dad was the breadwinner, with no college degree, my mother was a homemaker. So I felt like I should go right to work as well. The issue is that that was more plausible 25 years ago than it is now (to make a living wage with no college)